

THE AWAKENING OF LESTERVILLE

EUGENE L. SMALL



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BIRTHDAY GREETINGS



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AWAKENING *of* LESTERVILLE



"Jones is on safe ground. You'll have to back down the same as I did!"

THE
AWAKENING
OF
LESTERVILLE

A NOVEL

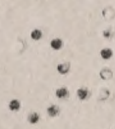
BY
EUGENE L. SMALL




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EUGENE L. SMALL.



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DEDICATION

This novel, in its next local edition, will be dedicated to that man in Kansas City, or group of men, who dares to get back of the big program herein set forth.

AWAKENING *of* LESTERVILLE

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INTRODUCTION

The author wishes to request that this novel be judged on a basis of naturalness in the sphere in which it takes its setting. It was not intended for scholars on the one hand, nor can it be appreciated by those who habitually refuse to think.

Delbert Jones and Maytie Ray are intended as representative young people in their profession, which makes their message the more valuable. If they were mentally or otherwise super-normal, they might be tempted into an abstract discussion; as it is, they deliver a practical message. It is a redeeming thing about Mr. Dayton and Mr. Towne that they do not put up a hard fight, as many of their class do. These two men are either too wise or too honest to oppose Mr. Jones when they know he is in the right.

The book is addressed to the old as well as the young—to the old in the hope that a larger view of the vital things contained may still be appreciated, and to the young as a warning against that narrowness and conceit which prevents the full unfoldment of the mind and heart and retards the progress of mankind.

E. L. SMALL.

Chicago Lawn, Illinois, June, 1918,

CHAPTER I.

A NEW VOCATION

It was after supper in his sister's home in Chicago, which for several years had also been his home, that Delbert Jones began telling of times and events that used to be. Whether his niece's history, lying carelessly in the window, or the young people in the park across the way had anything to do with his particular recollections at that time, no one will ever know. Speaking to his sister he said:

"Do you know, Flo, what I was doing ten years ago to-night at this very hour? Give you two minutes."

"Couldn't guess if you'd give me two hours," replied Flora. "That part of my mental machinery which was running ten years ago is all rusty now."

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“One cannot forget so fast as that, Flo. In fact, they say we never forget anything. You don’t just know which button to press to start the machinery a-going. That’s the trouble. Well, I’ll tell you what I was doing. I was getting ready to attend the commencement exercises of my class. I received a high school diploma that night. Remember? My, but we youngsters thought we were smart!”

“Well, you did have lots to be proud of, Delbert. You were only seventeen, and had made your way through high school by your own efforts—no one furnished you with a cent. And do you remember what happened after the exercises that night?”

“I remember that Mr. Brown came forward and congratulated me and told me that if I wanted a position in their wholesale clothing store at ten dollars a week to come to work Monday morning. I remember, too,

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that I went. Ten dollars a week looked big to me then."

"Let's see. You worked for Brown and Company a little more than three years, receiving several nice raises, and quit with about \$900 in your pocket to take up a course in the university."

"But I thought your mental machinery was rusty in that part, Flo."

"And, during the four years you were in the university, you more than made your way by selling life insurance. You must have had over \$1,000 when you started to the theological seminary. Do you remember, Delbert, why you quit studying theology at the end of the first year?"

"Never mind now! Your memory of some things is altogether too good."

"Yes, and what advantage has your education ever been to you, Delbert? Don't you sometimes wish you had your money back, and your time?"

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"Never! The college spirit, the association, and the broader view of life one gets, to say nothing of the little useful education one picks up, is worth many times its cost."

"But, when you graduated from the university and put in a year in the seminary, you went right onto the road for the Company. Does your college education help you sell clothing?"

"Certainly! It helps me to approach men. I have no fear of being awkward either in actions or in language. And it prepares me for emergencies. And then, think of the pleasant recollections I have—the memories of those college days. If ever I raise a family, Flo, I shall give my children all the education they have the desire and capacity for."

"Go to the door, Delbert, and answer the bell, please, my lap's full."

"Hello! Yes! Bring it in!"

"Who is it, Delbert?"

"Messenger boy with a telegram."

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“Hope there’s no bad news. My, Delbert, I bet it’s about Grace. I fear she’s dead. Goodness!”

“Don’t get fidgety now. Suppose it’s from the Company. They probably want to see me at the office to-morrow.”

“Sign right there on the third line, mister.”

“Goodness’ sake, Delbert, read it! No, don’t read it till you give me a hint of what it’s about.”

“Get your smelling salts now, and prepare for a shock, little bundle of nerves!”

“I don’t care. I just hate telegrams. You can never tell what to expect. I wish such a thing as the telegraph had never been invented. Samuel F. B. Morse should have been hanged.”

“Let the ashes of that great man rest in peace, Flo. Listen!

“ ‘Lesterville, Michigan, 6-18-18. Delbert Jones, 6539 Duane Ave., Chicago. Board met, considered references, unani-

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mously elected you to teach in the High Room of our school ensuing year at \$100 per month. We are mailing contract to-day. W. L. Bain, Director.' ”

“What does that mean, Delbert?”

“It means that I am going to quit the road to take up the profession of my choice. I am mentally rested now from my five years of close study in college.”

“Well, well, well! I know it has been your ambition, though, from a child up, to be a college professor; and I suppose, Delbert, it is necessary to begin at the foot of the ladder. But what will the Company say?”

“They will not be surprised. My contract is up, and I had a little argument with the manager the other day.”

“Ah! I see! Some hard feelings between you!”

“None whatever, Flo. On the contrary he offered me a raise in salary of \$200 a year if I would continue. You see, this is the way

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it was: About a month ago, they told me they wanted me to open up new territory in Iowa, as they do scarcely any business in that state now. So, for a month back, I have been 'breaking in' a new man to take my place in Wisconsin. The fellow starts out by himself Monday.

"About a week ago, the manager came up to Madison to see me and explain the *modus operandi* of getting a foot-hold in Iowa. Now, the different tricks which they wanted me to resort to in order to get customers were not to my liking, and I told him that I would not take up the work, and that I did not care to continue longer with the Company as I had other plans."

"Then I 'phoned a teachers' agency on Van Buren street that I wanted a school. I sent references to the agency, which they forwarded to a board over in Michigan, and this telegram is the result."

"I suppose, now, you'll settle down and

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get married, won't you, Delbert? Get some school ma'am probably—some one who can't sew on a button or darn a stocking or make a loaf of bread or—”

“Hold on, now! Just hold on! Why is a woman's mind always running to matrimony? When I'm ready to marry I'll try to get a teacher of domestic science in some high school.”

“Well, I don't know. That *might* do. When does your school begin?”

“Last Monday in August. But I want to land there the Saturday before to ‘get my bearings’, as they say. It's only a little two-room school in the country village of Lester-ville, about four miles off the railroad. I shall have the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. The primary teacher will have the grades below.

“Well, it's getting late,” said Delbert.
“Good night, sis! Guess I'll retire and see

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if I can dream how to solve the multiplication table."

"Good night, professor! See that you don't dream about that primary department over in Michigan."

"By the way, Delbert, how would it effect you over there if it should get out why you quit studying for the ministry?"

"Don't know! Don't intend to let it worry me any, either."

CHAPTER II.

OFF TO THE FIELD OF LABOR

Like many another man, Delbert Jones never knew what it meant to have a vacation. Soon after he was thirteen years old, though his parents were dead, he started to high school. When he was not in school, he was at work; when he was not in college, he was making money to pay for more education; and when he was on the road for the firm, he put in full time. Largely out of curiosity, he now resolved to have a real vacation—to roam for two months or more over the fruit belt of Michigan, to ply the oars in her beautiful lakes, and to angle in her famous streams. And that summer he was more than satisfied.

On Friday afternoon, August twenty-seventh, at an unusual hour for Lesterville

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passengers, Delbert Jones stepped off the train at Wheaton, and quickly 'phoned for a rig to take him to his new field of labor. Presently the liveryman's right-hand man appeared, a man whose language betrayed a weak will and a character to correspond.

In this manner Dick Rooney approached Delbert Jones:

"Be you the gentleman that's goin' to Lesterville?"

"I'm the man, sir!"

"Well, jus' jump right in an' I'll deliver you there in a mighty few minutes. This here nag's a hard looker an' he's blind, but he knows how t' pick up his feet."

"Don't understand you. Can't see how he can be a hard looker when he's blind."

"Well, now! Where did you come from? That's the way we hosslers over here talk when we want to 'pologise for a bony sort o' critter."

"O, I see!"

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"Knowed you wouldn't be blind long 'round me. Say, pard, have you got anything in your hip pocket?"

"Bottle of peppermint oil I was using up north to keep the mosquitos off when I went a-fishing."

"Lordy, if that's all you've got you kin keep it. There's somethin' worse than skeeters a knawin' at the inside of my stumick."

"Say, Mr. Liveryman, what kind of a town is Lesterville?" inquired Delbert after they had been on the road for probably twenty minutes.

"Well, sir, thar' sets th' town on the hill. You can see fer yourself in a few minutes. But t' answer your question from the stan' pint of a common plain citizen like myself, whose system requires a little bracin' up once in a while, it's a mighty poor place. From the stan' pint of religion, it's a mighty poor place, too, for the preachers make it impossible fer a feller to git a drop of the great

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staple of life. An' from a bizniz stan' pint, it's onbizniz-like. The dum store keepers don't sell no fluid 'cept kersine oil an' vinegar, 'cept mebbby its to the chosen few whose got the proper signs an' passwords."

"How is it from an educational standpoint, Mr. Rooney?"

"Over edgecated—too much edgecation. That's the hull secret of it. A little learnin' is a dangerous thing, an' too much is sure ruin.

"The man that's been a teachin' over here in Lesterville taught up all he knew an' somethin' besides, but he's gone now. But a travelin' man told me the other day that the new teacher that's been hired went to school fer a year where they make preachers. Said he used to know him. Ef that's so he'll have t' walk back an' to from the train every time. I'll be hanged if I'll carry a preacher ur even part of a preacher!

"Well, now, pard, here's the hotel. Have

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you got any sample cases that you want brought over when the stage goes to meet the 'eight o'clock' after while?"

"No, but you may take this check and bring my private trunk. I'm going to stay here for a while."

"I see. You're jus' a visitin'!"

"No, I'm going to work here."

"Don't look like a farm hand, I vow."

"No, I'm going to teach in the grammar department of the school here."

"Well—er—ah—Lordy! Didn't know who you wuz!"

"No. We never met before," said Delbert. "Good bye!"

As Dick Rooney was crossing the street he was heard to mutter to himself:

"I've gone an' dun it now, hain't I? What if he tells the merchants an' the parsons, an' takes things to himself that I said! Wonder how it'll 'fect Dick Rooney's job! It's allays easier to tell things than to on-tell 'em!"

CHAPTER III.

FIRST DAY IN THE VILLAGE

After a good night's sleep in the village hotel, Delbert Jones rose to an early breakfast. He then proceeded to look the town over, which, for one year at least, was to be his home. The air was pure and sweet and balmy, such as makes one feel the sudden departure of all one's cares. Delbert went to the south end of the village and then to the north, drinking in the freshness and beauty of Lesterville. Such restful homes as were those of the retired farmers. Such broad, well-kept lawns; yes, broad and easy and devoid of that cramped effect which one always feels in a large city. And such shade trees, too, as lined the streets—trees that rarely lift their huge arms to the sky in a metropolis like Chicago. Much in contrast

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was Delbert Jones' concept of Lesterville to that of Dick Rooney, whose estimate of everything was always in terms of the wreckage of his own life.

Out of respect to the director of the school, with whom he had corresponded during the vacation, Delbert Jones called first on that individual whose income from office seems at times to be only the kicks and ingratitude of those who elevated him to the place. The bell rang. Foot-steps were soon heard in the hall, and the front door began to swing.

"Is this Mr. Bain?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Mr. Bain, I am Mr. Jones."

"Ah, yes, the school teacher. I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Jones, and surprised as well. Didn't expect to see you till this evening. Come right in!"

After a short visit of a social and business nature, the two men started for the stores, where the director introduced the new teacher

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to all the merchants of the village, the doctor, dentist, post master, justice of the peace, blacksmith, and editor of the local paper, together with such other citizens as chanced to be on the street that Saturday forenoon.

"I thank you, Mr. Bain," said Delbert to the director, "for your kindness in introducing me to the people of Lesterville. Tell me now, please, where I had best inquire regarding board and rooms."

"Well, sir, there are probably only two places where you can find the accommodations you will want. I will leave you alone to look after that matter. Inquire two blocks north of here for the home of Silas Jerry, or the home of William Buff. They are across the street from each other, and either family will be pleased to receive you."

Mr. Jones was not long at engaging a place for one week at Buff's. Mrs. Buff was at first a little disappointed at securing the new teacher for so short a time, but soon mis-

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trusted that it was Mr. Jones' plan not to be in haste to decide where he should locate permanently. Confidence in her ability to please the teacher, however, set her mind at ease, for Mandy Buff knew well of her skill in the culinary art, and that her rooms, though plainly furnished, were as pleasant as the village afforded. Knowledge that one is prepared to do a useful work in life, and an opportunity to try, is all an honest person should ask.

Promising Mrs. Buff that he would be at her place for dinner, Delbert Jones returned to one of the stores where he had seen a telephone booth. Stepping in, he called:

"Central, does Miss Maytie Ray, the primary teacher, have a 'phone?"

"She has. Shall I give you her number?"

"If you please."

"Hello! Is this the home of Miss Ray? Is she in? Ah, yes! Miss Ray, I am Mr. Jones."

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"The Mr. Jones who is to teach in our grammar department next year?"

"Yes, Miss Ray. Pardon me for introducing myself in this manner. I simply wanted to ask the favor of a short talk with you at your earliest convenience. I know it is asking a great deal of you at this busy time, but I am altogether in the dark in regard to some important things about the school."

"I have just finished planning a little work for my own grades, Mr. Jones. If you are ready you may come over now, and I shall be delighted to furnish you with whatever information I can."

"Thank you, Miss Ray, I'll be right over."

Rising from the stool in the booth, Delbert Jones was soon off for the home of the widow Ray, who lives in a commodious house just around the corner on the next street. Now, Mrs. Ray has four married sons on large farms near Lesterville, with any one of whom

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she might live and be very welcome, but she chooses rather to reside in town, keeping house for herself and only daughter, Miss Maytie, who for five years has been teaching in the village school.

Mr. Jones received a cordial welcome from both Miss Ray and her excellent mother. Matters of interest only to teachers who have related work before them were superficially gone over, and Mr. Jones then started on his way to Mandy Buff's, as it was nearing the dinner hour.

Mrs. Buff met the new teacher at the door with a smile and cordiality which made him feel at home from the first:

"Dinner will be ready in about ten minutes, Mr. Jones. If you care to, you might step right up stairs to the front rooms, which are to be yours. They are in readiness, and Dick Rooney placed your trunk in the hallway."

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“Just what I’ll do, thank you, Mrs. Buff; and I’ll be ready at your call.”

Now, Mandy knew better than to overdo the first meal and then to gradually reduce rations, as a less experienced housewife might be tempted to do; but her dinner was substantial and attractive and all that any one in good health and with a reasonable appetite could ask for. Mandy, her easy-going husband, and Delbert Jones, together with old Tom, the cat, would constitute the entire family.

When the meal was over, Mrs. Buff insisted that Mr. Jones make himself “right at home.” He accordingly stepped into the sitting room and took an easy rocker near the window. Mrs. Buff followed a moment later with the Friday issue of the local paper.

“Thought you might like to see our village paper, Mr. Jones. Here is a nice article on the front page which I want you to read.”

After thanking Mrs. Buff for her kind-

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ness, Delbert proceeded with the flattering little article about himself. How interesting it is to see ourselves as other see us; or sometimes, as in this case, as others hear about and imagine us. O, if every week of school with the new teacher could only be as interesting as the week before it begins!

As Delbert Jones had never lived in a village, he was not aware that in a small place everybody, however lowly his station, is after all an important factor in the community. He was accordingly much interested in reading the short article about himself, and afterward a column which began in this wise:

PERSONAL

“Dolly Anderson is on the sick list.

“Frank Armsby is painting his house.

“Pete Hanson’s bays look mighty fine in their new harness.

“Sally Lane, who has been suffering from an attack of mumps, is improving.

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“The familiar face of Uncle Tom Parker is again to be seen on our streets.

“Will Hungerford fell from a load of hay the other day and dislocated his shoulder.

“Old Dan, the blacksmith’s dog, who has been failing for the past year, had to be shot. Everybody will miss old Dan.

“Some one visited Bob Robert’s hen roost, Thursday night. The barking of the dog, however, scared out the would-be thief. That individual may have his hat by calling at this office. It is a familiar one.”

* * *

Presently Mrs. Buff put in her appearance with innocent William not far behind. With plaintive sigh she began:

“Well, Mr. Jones, I suppose you have already discovered that this isn’t Chicago. You will come to realize the fact more and more as you live here. You will miss the life and hustle which you are used to. You will miss the the-ate-ers too, and the musi-

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cals, and the nice parks, and the big stores where you can buy anything you want."

Not to find fault with his own city, but to reprove Mrs. Buff, who had ideal surroundings which she did not appreciate, Delbert replied:

"Yes, and I'll miss the noisy street cars, too, that run all night; and the smoky air; and the warm water that we have to drink from underground pipes; and the smell of packing houses; and such like."

"O, yes," sighed Mandy, "but then! It isn't anything here like it was down where we came from. I do wish we could get away. I'm so sick of the place. It just seems that it's too warm or too cold all the time, or too wet or too dry, or something else. But William will stick here, says he's too poor to get away."

Then she continued:

"I'll tell you something else you won't miss, either, Mr. Jones. That's mean people.

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I believe there are some of the worst people here I ever saw. There's Tim Brown next door north. Every time Tim goes to Greenburg he gets drunk and comes home and raises Cain with everybody. His wife's got a black eye now that he gave her a few days ago. And there's Hank Smith and Bill Farthington and Dode Williams and old George Rule, a lower down set can't be found anywhere! Can they William?"

"You're telling it, Mandy."

"By the way, William, some one's been trying to steal chickens from Bob Roberts. Bet I can guess who it was, too. The fellow lost his hat in the escapade. It's down at the Republican office now. I want you to go down and see who it belongs to. Can't you go now, William?"

"Not just yet. I've got to have a smoke."

"Well, Mrs. Buff," said Delbert, "I've really fallen in love with Lesterville, myself. The pure air and sunlight, the beauti-

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ful homes and lawns and shade trees, and the clear cool fresh water that comes from these deep wells! My, these things appeal to me! Then you have your vegetables fresh from your own garden, pure milk and butter from your own cow, fresh eggs all you can use, and no rent to pay. Really, Mrs. Buff, I'm in love with the place. By the way, Mrs. Buff, who are some of your *good* people?"

"Well, there ain't hardly any nice people at this end of town. There's Mrs. Lucas at the south end, she's quite a nice lady."

"Who else?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Charles Stocum, across from Mrs. Lucas, they're nice too, they say."

After a prolonged silence Delbert asked:

"Are these all the good people you have?"

"O, no!"

"Well, Mrs. Buff, I've been here only a half a day you might say, and I've met probably twenty people, and they seem so very

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cordial! Their faces and actions, too, show every mark of virtue and kindness!"

"Yes, they'll almost eat you up for a while; but, mind what I say, Mr. Jones, you won't be here three months before they can't say enough mean things about you. It's the awfulest place you ever saw for grumblers and gossipers!"

"Bad thing, Mrs. Buff, bad thing! This tale-bearing reminds me of a lot of dogs carrying a bone about. One dog gets it, carries it for a while and drops it down. Another takes it up and carries it for a while and drops it for some other dog, and so on. The more it is carried about, the filthier it becomes.

"Well, believe I'll go down and look the school house over—see the library, and the apparatus they have for teaching science. What is your supper hour, Mrs. Buff?"

"Six o'clock, Mr. Jones, if that suits you."

"Very well! I'll be ready at that hour."

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At this point, Delbert Jones departed, leaving Mandy and William to themselves.

"Mandy, did you get that lesson the new teacher was expounding?"

"Expounding!"

"Didn't comprehend him, eh?"

"Comprehend! I never comprehended anybody in my life. Bill Buff, what's the matter with you? Are you crazy? Or are you just practicing on me so you can use big words around Mr. Jones?"

"You didn't see the point, then."

"No, I didn't see the point, then!"

"When the pension comes next time, I'm going to buy a capacity for your understanding, Mandy—one big enough to hold a point anyway. You couldn't see that Mr. Jones was disgusted with you and was trying to teach you a lesson, could you?"

"What do you mean, William?"

"I mean just what I say. I mean that all the time you was in the settin' room you was

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findin' fault with the weather and with the town and with the people. You said it was the awfulest place you ever saw for grumblin', and yet you was a grumblin' every breath. You told him all the things he'd miss by living in this little burg; said it wasn't like it was down in Ohio where we came from; that you hated it because it was always too hot or too cold or too wet or too dry.

"You gossiped, too. Yes, you did. You know what you said about Tim Brown and Hank Smith and Bill Farthington and Dode Williams and old George Rule. Don't you? If that isn't gossip, I'd like to know what it is! And when he got all he could stand of it, he said (know what he said Mandy?) he said, 'Mrs. Buff, who are some of your *good* people?' But you didn't see the point! Then he compared you to a dog carrying a dirty bone around, and *still* you didn't see the point!"

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“But I see it now, William! I see it now! The good Lord deliver us from all our sins. If you was so bright, why didn’t you wink at me or shake your head or cough a little or make a noise in your throat? If it had been you, Bill Buff, I’d have gone right out in the kitchen and said, ‘William, I want an armload of wood *right away!*’ And I’d a gone to the shed with you, and taught you some sense.”

“Yes, Mandy, I could have done that, too, but really I sorter wanted to see you get a lesson on that subject. You needed it, old woman. He’s a pretty decent fellow, Mandy! Good *teacher. Fine!*”

“William Buff, how’ll I ever face Mr. Jones this evening at supper! How’ll I ever do it! I—just—can’t!”

“Of course, you can, Mandy!”

“How?”

“Just say: ‘What a fine day it’s been, Mr. Jones!’ Tell him what a good cow we’ve got

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—how much milk she gives; or about the berries you canned last summer from our own vines; or how the neighbors came in and helped you out when you was sick last spring; or what a lot of nice young people he'll have in his school. And ask him to go to church with you in the morning. Then he'll think maybe you're a pretty decent woman after all!"

"O, William! You're a darling old hubby, anyway. If you do see Mandy git into trouble, you're always helpin' her out. Give the Devil his due!"

"My, but that comparison, Mandy! The 'Devil!' Why, it's worse than the one Mr. Jones used about the dogs and the bone. But I'll suffer anything, Mandy, if you'll only stop grumbling about the town and finding fault with the neighbors."

CHAPTER IV.

DELBERT WITH HIS CO-WORKER

It was four o'clock, Monday evening, the first day of school—that day long famed as the one when teacher studies pupil and pupil studies teacher. If the teacher has only mastered *his* first lesson as well as those in front of him have mastered theirs, he has made a good beginning, and his wisdom will have to be reckoned with. Nature study and mind reading date way back to the time when the first pupil went to the first teacher in the first school. But, whatever progress was made in the study of human nature that day, thirty-eight bright youngsters with smiling face and satisfied step filed out at four o'clock to the time-honored command of the "One! two! three!"

Just in front of Delbert Jones, and to his

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left, was a door leading to the other department of the school, which was ably managed by a teacher who had already had several years of successful experience. Delbert, on the Saturday before, had been assured by Miss Ray that she would be willing to assist him to start his work if he had any questions to ask. Accordingly, after school was out, he repaired to her room to ask about the keeping of a daily register.

“Well, how did the first day of school go, Mr. Jones?”

“Very satisfactorily!”

“That’s good. You know they say, ‘Well begun is half done.’ And how are you going to like Lesterville?”

“Lesterville is a charming little village. I went with Mrs. Buff to the Methodist church yesterday morning and heard a good sermon and met some very fine people.”

“Yes, some of my good Methodist friends were congratulating themselves Sunday that

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the new teacher was going to attend their church. But when you went to the Baptist in the evening, they weren't so sure about it. How did you like *our* minister, Elder Black?"

"Very well. I met him and several members of the congregation. They seem very friendly. I felt right at home."

"Brother Henry, the gentleman I was with, wanted to meet you; but it seemed that I couldn't get you together."

"Is he a relative of any of the Henry children in my room? I have children from two families of that name, I believe."

"O, no, he is my brother—my youngest brother."

"O, I beg pardon. I thought he was only a church brother, and that his last name was 'Henry.' "

"No, I haven't any church brothers. I am not a member of the church, though I do sing in the choir and otherwise take a

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more or less active part in church work."

"Well, guess I'll return to my own part of the mill," said Delbert. "O, yes, I almost forgot what I came for."

At this Delbert asked his question and received an answer which had the ring of good sense.

"Thank you, Miss Ray," said Delbert. "I like the sound of that suggestion. Why didn't I think of that myself? What are you going to charge me for advice the first month, Miss Ray, while I am so very green at this business?"

Here was Maytie's opportunity. The temptation was too great. She could not let it pass.

"I might trade some of this kind of knowledge for some theology, Mr. Jones."

Delbert was at first a little surprised; but, with a smile, soon inquired:

"What do you mean, Miss Ray?"

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“Could that proposition have more than one meaning, Mr. Jones?”

—“Presume not. What do you know about my experience in a theological school, Miss Ray?”

“Only what a traveling man remarked in one of the stores this summer. He said he knew you when you were studying in a theological seminary, that you put in a year preparing for the ministry. Some of our town’s people have wondered why you did not go on and finish your course in theology.”

“I fear, Miss Ray, that you’d find theology rather dry, especially since you are not a member of any church,” said Delbert, making no reply to what the town’s people had been wondering.

“Really, I’d like to ask somebody some questions, somebody who has made a study of religion. Off and on for six years, I’ve tried to get something out of Elder Black; but I can’t. Last winter, when a revival

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was on in our church, I asked him to give me the title of some good book on the other religions of the world. What do you suppose he said?"

"Can't imagine."

"He said, 'Isn't the Christian religion good enough for you?' Now, Mr. Jones, what if you and I as teachers should never read but one authority on education? Could we long maintain any standing in the profession?"

"As teachers, Miss Ray, we are expected to read a good many books on the subject in order to get a glimpse, at least, of the field of learning."

"Well, tell me then, Mr. Jones, why ministers never give us discourses, brief ones would do, of course, on the other great religions of mankind. Is to know other religions, to think less of Christianity?"

"I hardly think so, Miss Ray. I see you are of much the same mind I was when I

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started to the seminary. Accordingly, I selected the 'World's Great Religions' as one of my courses. This enabled me to compare the claims of the other great religions with the claims of Christianity."

"Say, that would be a delightful subject! All I should care for, however, would be a bird's-eye view, as it were, of the foreign religions. I don't care to know much about them—just enough to compare fundamental principles is all. Then Christianity would have a larger meaning for me. Really, I'm going to settle upon something more definite, if I can, with regard to religion. I'm getting ashamed of my ignorance of that subject, and also of holding myself aloof from the church. I believe it the duty of every teacher to be identified more vitally with the church than I am."

"I think you are quite right, Miss Ray, as to a teacher's duty to religion. I think you are pursuing, or trying to pursue, the

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right course, too. And you are one of that commendable kind who is determined not to go into anything blindly, not even religion!"

"What you say is true, Mr. Jones. Now, I don't believe that one church member in a hundred knows a picayune about religion as a world movement. I don't see why the ministers don't enlighten them—don't open their eyes. The church, as far as I can see, is only an asylum for the partially blind, where little is done to cure."

"I think your figure a very apt one, Miss Ray."

"Well, Mr. Jones, I will say nothing more on this subject now, lest I weary you. Mother wanted me to ask if you would come over after church next Sunday and take dinner with us. It is brother Henry's way to get acquainted with you. He's a great friend of school teachers. In fact, he married one. You will find that Lesterville is quite a place for Sunday dinners."

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"You tell your mother, Miss Ray, that I shall be pleased to come."

"Then, after dinner, if you are not in a hurry, would it be mean of me to ask a few questions about the great religions, Mr. Jones?"

"Most assuredly not, Miss Ray. And I shall be glad to furnish you all the information I can."

"You see, Mr. Jones, I gave you some valuable help on your daily register, and now I want my pay," jokingly remarked Maytie.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE HOME OF THE RAYS

It was a busy week with Delbert Jones, with his school work on hand, which he would never allow to suffer, and his review of the world's great religions, which he desired to have fresh in mind for use the next Sunday.

Somewhat out of respect to the people with whom he was to take dinner that day, Delbert attended morning services at the Baptist church. The usual spell came over him as he entered the door of the sanctuary. That sweet music which conducts the worshiper to his pew told him one of the greatest truths of religion. It had always been that way. Delbert could always believe the organ, and he could always believe the

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preacher so long as he kept in tune. But when the preacher got out of tune with the organ, he got out of tune with Delbert, though nothing was ever said.

After services, Mr. Jones was introduced to Henry Ray; and together they walked to the home of Henry's mother, the women following a few moments later. The two men were together most of the time till dinner. Delbert soon came to have much respect for Henry's knowledge of the farm, and Henry was not long in finding out that Delbert knew something about many things beside books.

Dinner, which had largely been prepared the day before, was soon ready. Little pleasantries were indulged in at the table; and, after the meal, the men repaired to the commodious sitting room to continue their visit, while the women looked after affairs at the business end of the house. In due time the three ladies came in, making a ma-

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jority in favor of the fair sex, and lending that air to the situation which is always essential to real company. But Henry soon became mindful of his stock on the farm. He and his wife accordingly soon took their departure; not, however, till an urgent invitation had been extended to Delbert to come to the farm some Friday night and stay over Sunday.

Now, Delbert Jones felt the influence of both a mother and a sister when he was left alone in the widow's house with Delvina Ray and her beautiful daughter; and no rule of polite society would require Delbert to take his departure just because Henry had. In fact, Maytie had asked Delbert to explain something to her about the great religions, and he had promised.

At the first lull in conversation, the mother said:

"Can't you children play and sing some?"

"You children!" That made Delbert feel

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the mother influence all the more. Delvina Ray had asked that very same question in that very same way probably a hundred times before. Maytie knew all her mother's old favorite hymns, and accordingly asked Delbert to help her sing, "No Book Is Like the Bible"; also "Refuge"; then, "Where Is My Wandering Boy To-night." Like so many good souls, nothing but hymn tunes would do for Delvina Ray on Sunday. Too bad there aren't more like her!

These were all two-part songs, written for soprano and tenor voices, and both the young people were in proper tune that afternoon. The mother declared she had never heard such singing before in all her life. Indeed, their voices did balance and blend to perfection—they did certainly go together well that day on those particular hymns, and Delbert and Maytie were truly in the singing mood. And I wonder why!

With Delbert it was easy to explain. For

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more than two months he had been roaming around over rugged parts of Michigan, in stern environment all the while, and away from home influence and the fascinating wiles of the gentle sex. "Home"—what a spell it casts over a man when he has been away from its hallowed precincts for a while! And "woman"—well somehow she seems necessary.

After the singing of those good old "hymn tunes" for Mrs. Ray, the daughter remarked:

"Are you ready now, Mr. Jones, to tell me something about that course you had in the seminary?"

"Mr. Jones, if you can settle some of that girl's troubles, I would be a thousand times obliged to you. Here she is twenty-four years old and without Christ. Really, I lose sleep over her."

"I wanted Mr. Jones to tell me some-

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thing about the other great religions, mother."

"Maytie Ray, Mr. Jones will think your mother doesn't know anything, and I've been a Baptist nigh onto fifty years. Haven't I told you time and again, child, that there *are* no other great religions? Every nation in the world is either a *Christian* nation or a *heathen* nation! Am I not right, Mr. Jones? Our ministers all tell us so."

"According to the dictionary, Mrs. Ray, you are quite right. But the word 'heathen' in that sense means simply 'non-Christian.' Of course, any nation is either Christian or non-Christian."

Then Maytie put in her question:

"How many religions are there in the world, Mr. Jones?"

"Many, many! I don't know how many. But we recognize seven great world religions, including our own."

Then the mother had an idea:

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“But six of those religions could all be bunched together and labeled ‘heathen,’ leaving only the one real religion, Christianity, could they not, Mr. Jones?” said the old lady.

“Not in the sense you mean, Mrs. Ray.”

“Well, do tell the child all you can about them. Christianity, which has served mother so well these fifty years, isn’t good enough for my Maytie. She’s looking for something better.”

“Not necessarily, mother. Say, mother, do you remember I showed you a picture the other day—a picture of a tree drawn by one of my pupils?”

“Yes.”

“And do you remember you said you didn’t like it because it was by itself, that it would look better if there were others about it to show it off, that it looked lonely?”

“Yes, dear, I remember. But what of it?”

“Well, Christianity to me is like that tree,

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mother. It needs to have the other religions grouped about it to show it off, to show its relative importance."

"You see, Mr. Jones, Maytie has more education than her mother has, and it takes more to satisfy her mind."

"You are not sorry, are you, Mrs. Ray?"

"O, no! I believe in education!"

"You see, Mrs. Ray, your daughter has a very inquiring mind."

"Yes, and a pint of water won't fill a gallon jar, either," said the mother proudly. "I know Maytie's smart—she's just like her father was."

"Let's have Mr. Jones go on and tell us about the other great religions, mother."

"Certainly, dear! Let him go on! Now, you young folks please excuse me. I'll drop in often enough to keep run of the story and help you out what I can. You see, mother hasn't gone to the Baptist church nigh onto

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fifty years without learning all about the *heathen!*”

Delbert might have inferred, from the fact that Mrs. Ray left the room, that she was unfriendly to his topic, in which case he would not have taken up its discussion in her home—even though he had at a previous time consented. But the fact that she had said, “I’ll drop in often enough to keep run of the story and help you out what I can” was assurance that he was very welcome to tell Maytie the things she wanted to know. Evidently Mrs. Ray thought she had heard all there was to be heard about the “heathen,” and than she would be lending dignity to her position by assuming a degree of that I-have-heard-it-all air. Then, too, it was her daughter’s part of the program. Let her take her lesson.

“It seems like imposition to ask you to go over what you have gone over time and

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again, Mr. Jones," said Maytie. "I shall tire you, I fear."

"Religion, Miss Ray, is the grandest theme for contemplation by the human mind. I never tire of it. Do you wish me to tell you about the crude conceptions of the ancient barbarians, and the practices growing out of their superstition?"

"The briefer mention of them the better, Mr. Jones."

"It is a well-known fact, Miss Ray, that primitive men regarded with awe everything in nature which had power to harm them. The light of the sun, the consuming fire of the forest, thunder, lightning, storm, earthquake, and the like, filled them with fear. They associated angry gods with these phenomena."

"They probably exercised much care, then, Mr. Jones, lest they arouse the displeasure of these terrible beings."

"They probably did, Miss Ray, and in

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times of real danger they strove to appease the wrath of these gods through a variety of sacrifices, sometimes even offering human beings."

"How do you like that, Maytie?" asked the mother who had just returned to the room.

"This looks little like religion, mother, but probably marks its beginning."

"I shall not attempt to tell you, either, about those religions which were only transient or which attracted only a small following, unless you request it."

"Tell 'er all about 'em, Mr. Jones. Give 'er her fill while you're at it. If Maytie wants to be a heathen, let her know what they're like." The young people could scarcely refrain from smiling at the mother's remark.

"But," continued Delbert, "alongside these crude beginnings, great religions rose up which were destined to live and to shape

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in large measure the lives of millions of souls."

"How many of the seven great world religions were introduced before Christ, Mr. Jones?"

"Five—Brahmanism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, in the order named. Then came Christianity, followed in the fifth century by Moham-medanism."

"But, Mr. Jones," spoke up the mother, "is it really proper to call any of these a genuine religion except Christianity? Did not our blessed Savior give the world the only religion?"

"They all go by that *name*, Mrs. Ray," replied Delbert in a manner to assume no responsibility for the term, for he desired to get into no controversy with Mrs. Ray, at this time especially.

CHAPTER VI.

DOWN THE DISTANT AGES

“The first question I would ask, Mr. Jones, is this:

“What do the different great religions outside Judaism and Christianity have to say about God? Of course, we are acquainted with those two.”

* * *

“Barring what the ignorant say, the educated classes among the Brahmins believe in one God, whom they regard as the One First Cause. This being they call Varuna, and in their sacred writings they speak of him as omnipresent. Listen to these words from their Bible:

“‘If a man stands or walks or hides, if he goes to lie down or get up, — King

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Varuna knows it, for he is there. This earth, too, belongs to Varuna, the King, and this wide sky. He who should flee far beyond this sky would not there escape from Varuna.' ”

“Beautiful! Isn't it, Mr. Jones? Why, it sounds so much like our own Bible!”

“Yes, Maytie dear, but only think of calling our good God by that ugly name, ‘Varuna!’ ”

“There's nothing in a name, mother. It's all in the idea.”

“Zoroastrianism teaches,” continued Delbert, “that through all eternity there have been two great spirits in the world—Ormazd, the good spirit; and Ahriman, the evil spirit. According to this religion, people should banish from their minds and hearts all evil thoughts, and become co-workers with Ormazd in overthrowing evil.”

“Maytie, I believe that Zoroaster just stole most of that idea from Christ.”

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“Yes, mother, but Christ was not born until a thousand years after Zoroaster.”

“I see that theory wouldn’t do, Maytie. But I thought the followers of Zoroaster were heathens.”

“They were, mother, but ‘heathen’ only means non-Christian, Mr. Jones has told us.”

“Now, Confucianism, Miss Ray, which follows Zoroastrianism, but which precedes Christianity by five centuries, was founded on the teachings of Confucius, a noted Chinese philosopher. Confucius was certainly one of the finest and noblest of heathen teachers, but made no pretensions of having superior knowledge of the Creator. For five thousand years, however, the Chinese people have believed in Ti, an infinite God.

“The fifth of the important world religions in time, but the first in number of adherents, is Buddhism. Its promoter was one Buddha, a native of India. In its original statement, Buddhism is without a deity.

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In some lands, however, this religion has come to take on the God principle in a low form. In China the Buddhists are polytheistic, that is, they believe in many gods.

“Passing over Christianity, Miss Ray, our own religion, we come to Mohammedanism, which is the seventh and last of the great world religions. In any large city library you can find scores of books treating exhaustively all these world creeds.”

“Life is too short, Mr. Jones, to go so far into them. All I care for is to see them paralleled on the vital points. I am now getting just what I have desired for years. But what does Mohammedanism teach with regard to a supreme being?”

“Mohammedanism teaches there is a deity, their ‘Allah.’ We take the following two quotations from their sacred writings:

‘Say, He is God, Our God,

God the eternal.

He begetteth not nor is begotten,

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And there is none equal unto Him.'

'Verily your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days: Then he ascended the throne. He causeth the night to cover the day; it followeth it swiftly; and He created the sun and the moon and the stars, made subject utterly to His command. Do not the whole creation and command belong to Him? Blessed be God, the Lord of these Worlds.'

"Now, children," remarked Maytie's mother, "that statement about the world being created in six days was surely taken out of our Bible."

"That's possible, mother," replied Maytie, "for Mohammedanism sprang up as a religion several centuries after Christianity."

"What do *you* think about God yourself, Mr. Jones?" inquired Miss Maytie.

"Really, I don't *think* God at all, Miss Ray. I just go alone to the top of a high hill or a high building and look down upon

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the panorama below and up to the great blue sky above. Then I just *sense* a 'something' in the vastness which makes me reverent. I just *feel* a satisfying presence."

"The all-comforting thing about this whole matter, Mr. Jones, is the fact of the universal belief in a Supreme Being, let him be *where* he will and *what* he may."

* * *

"Tell me next, Mr. Jones, what these same great world religions teach with regard to the immortality of the soul."

"Brahmanism teaches that, after the death of the body, the souls of the pure return to Brahma whence they came, but that the great majority, not possessing the right degree of purity, must be born again and again into a higher and yet higher caste of society until they are finally fit for reabsorption into Brahma."

"What becomes of the bad people, Mr. Jones?"

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"The soul of the evil man, Miss Ray, is born into a lower caste of society, or may enter an unclean animal."

"Queer belief, isn't it?" asked Maytie.

"This part of their doctrine is commonly referred to, Miss Ray, as the transmigration of souls."

"Think, Maytie," said her mother, "of one's soul passing into an unclean animal at death. How awful!"

"But, mother, I should try to live so that my soul would return to Brahma."

"Yes, dear, but suppose you should make too many mistakes in life!"

"Well, mother, I don't know that it would be any worse for one's soul to pass into an unclean animal than to go to the torments of Hell forever. Would it?"

"What does Zoroastrianism teach on this point, Mr. Jones?"

"Zoroastrianism teaches that the souls of men at death have a journey to make over

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a narrow bridge, Miss Ray. Good souls make the journey in safety and come into the presence of Ormazd to remain with him in glory: while evil souls are sure to fall from the narrow way into a pit of woe, there to remain with Ahriman in misery. What do you think of this part of their religion, Miss Ray?"

"I can't see that this is materially different from the Heaven and Hell of Christianity.

"What do the Chinese people teach, Mr. Jones, with regard to immortality?"

"Confucianism is only a system of morals; and so cannot be taken into account on this point.

"Buddhism, however," continued Delbert, "teaches the doctrine of transmigration of souls, which is evidently borrowed from the Brahmans. Nirvana, the highest aspiration of the soul, is attained only after it has passed through a long series of wander-

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ings, coming up through higher and higher forms of animal life. The souls of the bad, however, descend into lower forms.

“Mohammedanism teaches that, after death and the final judgment of souls, all must pass over a bridge narrower than the width of a hair. The virtuous are successful in the journey and reach Heaven, a place of surcease of all pain, and for the fullest gratification of the senses. But the wicked are unsuccessful in making the passage and plunge below into Hell.”

“Personally, Mr. Jones,” inquired Maytie, “what do *you* think of the immortality claim of these world religions?”

“And why do you ask, Miss Ray? Do you sometimes doubt that the soul lives after death?”

“Yes, I sometimes wonder if immortality isn’t, after all, just a beautiful dream.”

“To me, Miss Ray, the spirit is just as

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real as the body; and immortality, just as real as life."

"What is the soul, anyway, Mr. Jones, that it cannot die?"

"The soul, Miss Ray, is that within which smells the rose; it is that within which sees the beautiful hillside covered with flowers; it is that within which hears sweet music."

"O, you're talking about the olfactory nerve, and the optic nerve, and the auditory nerve, Mr. Jones, and the brain!"

"Can the nerves and the brain be pleased, Miss Ray—entertained, delighted?" asked Delbert. "There is no satisfaction, no pleasure, you must remember, until after these brain records are taken into and acted upon by the soul. I fear, Miss Ray, that many people think of the soul as a sort of airy nothing, when in fact it is the real man."

"If I understand you, then, Mr. Jones, the body is a sort of connecting link, as it

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were, between the external physical world and the spirit, or real man."

"You have expressed it well, Miss Ray. And that Supreme Wisdom and Power which we call 'God' understood full well that man, the crowning glory of His creation, would be a miserable failure if later he learned that his destiny was to be a dark hole under the sod. Accordingly, that Infinite Wisdom gave to man an immortal soul and a sure faith in the future life."

"But, Mr. Jones, if our mind or spirit is so dependent for its thinking upon the images stored away in the gray matter of the brain, what shall we do in the spirit world with the brain back on earth and gone to dust?"

"Miss Ray, you are like the people who think of God as a being with head and body, hands and feet. You want to carry outlines of physical beings into the spirit world, and there find spirits which shall answer to these

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outlines or images. But, as it is a spiritual way we should discern what we call 'God', so shall it be a spiritual way we shall discern our friends. Just you think this over and over, and you'll understand. We must have our physical brain in this physical world; but we shall not need it in the spiritual, nay we could not use it!"

"But, shall we know our friends over there, Mr. Jones?"

"Personally, I am thoroughly convinced that we shall, Miss Ray, but not as we know them here, with physical form and pink cheeks; but with the same spiritual personality by which we know them here. Yes, Miss Ray, we shall know each other better there than we do here. Here we meet face to face, and often misunderstand each other: there we shall meet soul to soul."

Mother Ray had returned again from another room in time to hear Mr. Jones' last statements. She was delighted to know that

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her daughter was hearing that Sunday afternoon such earnest expressions of faith in God and immortality.

CHAPTER VII.

ENEMIES OF CIVILIZATION

“It seems to me, Mr. Jones, that the logical thing after a discussion of God and immortality would be the discussion of righteous living. I should like to know for what kind of *life* these same great religions stand.”

* * *

“Probably nothing about Brahmanism,” replied Delbert, “shows the attitude of its devotees to the question of righteousness better than do their prayers. Here is a portion of one of them:

‘Whenever we men, O Varuna, commit an offense against the heavenly host, whenever we break the law through thoughtlessness, punish us not, O Varuna, for our offense.’

“In another prayer the Brahman says:

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‘O free us from the sins of our fathers, and from those which we have committed with our own bodies.’ ”

“Aren’t those beautiful prayers? What do you think of them mother? Aren’t they fine?”

“Mr. Jones,” said the mother, “I want to ask you a question.”

“All right, Mrs. Ray.”

“Where did those prayers come from?”

“From the sacred writings of Brahmanism, Mrs. Ray.”

“Well, I’m dumbfounded—I’m thunder-struck, Mr. Jones! Why, I thought the Hindoo people were heathens!”

“They are, Mrs. Ray, that is, they are non-Christian, and that is all the word means in such a connection.

“Now, the Zoroastrian Bible, the ‘Avesta’, teaches that:

‘The will of the Lord is the Law of holiness.’

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‘Holiness is the best of all good.’

‘The one recital of the praise of holiness which is worth all that is between the earth and the heavens is that one which a man uttereth when he would renounce evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds.’

‘May we, O Lord, attain to union with thy purity for all eternity.’ ”

“These are beautiful thoughts, Mr. Jones. Aren’t they mother?”

“Mother is a Christian, Maytie, but she is finding out that Christianity hasn’t a monopoly of all the good things of religion.”

“Of course, I would not argue for one minute,” said Delbert, “that Zoroastrianism rises to the same high religious level that Christianity does. Some features of it, however, are truly charming.

“But,” resumed Delbert, “we shall see that Confucianism, which is the next great religion in order of time, has its surprises too.”



*“Well there, Mr. Jones, I’m dumbfounded—I’m
thunderstruck!”*

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"Ah, now, mother, now the Chinaman. Now the yellow fellow with the almond eyes," exclaimed Maytie in a charming girl-ish manner.

"Is it possible," inquired the mother, "to say anything good about those awful people who used to bind up their babies' feet so tight they couldn't grow?"

"Of course, Mrs. Ray, that was a terrible thing, but let me tell you some of the things Confucius taught his people with regard to conduct. Let me begin with the Golden Rule, which is found in negative form in one of their writings:

'What you do not want done to yourself do not do to others.' "

"Goodness' sake, mother! What do you think of that? Why, it embodies the exact thought of our own Golden Rule!"

Then Delbert resumed:

" 'Filial piety is the beginning of virtue, and brotherly love is the sequel of virtue.' "

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“Then,

‘Happy union with wife and children is like the music of lutes and harps. And when there is concord among brethren the harmony is delightful and enduring.’

“Then again we read that,

‘No virtue is higher than love to all men, and there is no loftier aim in government than to profit all men.’

“Then we find these words:

‘In the Book of Poetry are three hundred pieces, but the design of them all may be embraced in that one sentence, “Have no depraved thoughts.” ’

“The quotation,” said Maytie, “about concord among brethren, and the one about love, and the one about having no depraved thoughts are beautiful gems and worthy of a place in any Bible. Think so, mother?”

“They are very beautiful, Maytie dear.”

“The adherents of Buddhism, Miss Ray, who comprise about one-third of the population of the globe, are also taught many beau-

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tiful things in their sacred writings. Listen to this from their Tripitaka:

‘Not in the void of heaven, not in the depths of the sea, not by entering the rocky cliffs of the mountains, not in any of these places, nor by any means, can a man escape the consequences of his evil deeds.’

“Then again,” resumed Delbert, “did you ever hear a resolution like this:

‘A man who foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my ungrudging love. The more evil cometh from him, the more good shall go from me.’ ”

“Why, yes!” replied Maytie, “that’s the spirit of Jesus’ teachings.”

“Then, here’s some more of it, Miss Ray:

‘Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love.’

“Then *this* is worth listening to:

‘All that we are, is the result of all that we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an

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evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of him who draws the cart.'

"Then the Buddhist Bible has this to say also. What do you think of it, Miss Ray?

'As the bee collects honey and departs without injuring the flower, so let him who is wise dwell on the earth.' "

"O isn't that beautiful? I wish that were in our Bible. It is so splendid!" spoke Maytie enthusiastically.

"There are lots of true and beautiful things in the Tripitaka, Miss Ray. Here's something that everyone would do well to remember:

'Let no man think lightly of evil, saying in his heart, it will not come nigh me. Let no man think lightly of good, saying in his heart, It will not benefit me. Even by the falling of water-drops a water-pot is filled.'

"Then, how do you like this?

'Let a man overcome anger by love, evil

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by good, the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth.' ”

“I think, Mr. Jones, that if a Buddhist isn't a good man it's no fault of his religion. Why, it's so like Christianity!”

“Then, Miss Ray, much credit is due the Buddhist religion because of five important commandments it lays down. They are as follows:

‘Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not commit adultery, or any impurity. Thou shalt not lie. Thou shalt not intoxicate thyself.’”

“Well, there,” spoke up mother Ray, “I'm dumbfounded! That sounds just like our Bible again. Wish I had Elder Black by the neck. I'd choke him good! He always makes out that there isn't a particle of sense in any heathen belief—says they're all superstition.”

“Too bad we haven't that temperance com-

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mandment in our Bible, mother," said Maytie.

"Some college man has suggested that one of that tenor be inserted," replied Delbert.

"The youngest of these seven great religions, Mohammedanism, requires its members to say their prayers five times a day. What do you think of that, Miss Ray?"

"I don't see how they have time to do anything else, Mr. Jones. What kind of life do they stand for?"

"The Koran, which is their Bible, forbids the offering of sacrifices to idols, the playing of games of chance, the charging of usury, and the use of intoxicating liquors. It also declares that no one can be a true believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.' "

"These are certainly commendable teachings, Mr. Jones. I am delighted to know that these great world religions stand for God, immortality, and righteous living. I

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am thankful to you for the pains you have taken to call up these great witnesses to testify on what I consider the three most essential points in religion."

"The surprising thing to me, Mr. Jones," spoke up the mother, "is that there's one small particle of sense in any of these heathen religions. Why, I've always been led to believe that the only appropriate things to associate with heathen peoples are nonsense and wickedness, and it makes me feel just a little ugly to learn that I've always been deceived. In fact, Mr. Jones, I believe that portions here and there in those other religions are divinely inspired, and that it's only fair to say so."

"I think you are right, Mrs. Ray. No one of the great world religions has ever had a monopoly of divine inspiration. And just as the bee goes to many fields for its storehouse of honey, just so should we be

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free to search the ages for religious truth if we so desire. Of course, the fair-minded student is frank to confess that Christianity has the most to offer the race. It is one of the youngest of the great world religions; and has, in all probability, drawn heavily upon those which have gone before, as you have seen this afternoon from the quotations given. But God has never been a respecter of nations. He has had helpful relations with them all. In the measure that they have sought after him, they have found him. This, at least, is the conclusion to which I have come."

"But where would you go to church, Mr. Jones, with this broad view of religion?"

"Right in my own community, Mrs. Ray—right where you and all other good citizens should go. People do not have to think alike in all the details of their religion to go to the same church. We are all agreed on the great essential principles of religion,

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anyway; and the good Lord forgive any person who is so wrapped up in his own conceit that he can't spend one or two hours a week to hear a minister preach who has a few ideas of his own."

"But no Baptist or Methodist or other sectarian preacher would receive you into membership, with that broad view of religion you entertain."

"I know that, Mrs. Ray. All that the majority of such preachers are good for is to divide communities and split up families. They are enemies of civilization—not Christians at all, but promoters of denominational bigotry. The Great Judge may some day point them to the first chapter of First Corinthians, verses ten to thirteen, which they have all read time and again. These fellows should be requested to quit the ministry, and take up some kind of employment where they could earn an honest living. Broader men would then be found

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to take the places made vacant, and religion would improve. For some time to come, one large Christian church would be found to be a plenty in each community, that church to guarantee religious freedom to all. Questions of faith would then not be asked at the altar of those who would join. The belief of the candidate would be regarded as nobody's business. God would know, and that would be enough."

CHAPTER VIII.

GETTING READY FOR ACTION

The weeks flew by. September faded into golden October, and October into crisp November. Harvest time came and went. Lesterville was the center of life which was preparing for the frigid days of winter, when good things and good times in variety are abundant. Even religion comes in for a share of the spare time of all but the frivolous and the wicked; and that minister who presides over a village congregation is unprogressive if he does not hold a revival meeting during the winter. If there are two churches in the village, that means two revivals. And thus it was planned in Lesterville. The Methodists were to hold one early in December and the Baptists another late in January.

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After much correspondence, the board of the Methodist church secured Rev. P. L. Dayton, Evangelist, to conduct services for two weeks, and longer if interest warranted. Cottage prayer meetings had been held for some time to get the brethren ready to do their part in the coming event for the salvation of sinners, for preachers alone cannot make revivals a success. The choir, too, had been looking up recruits, and had already practiced several times. A cornet out of the Lesterville band and a violin were to be special attractions.

Delbert had just got back from Henry Ray's and made himself ready for church. It had been the practice with him for several months to consult the Republican for each minister's topic, and then decide which church to attend. Ordinarily this is no way to do, but with Delbert it was best under the circumstances. Mrs. Buff, though, had in some way misplaced the paper that week, so he was at a loss to decide.

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“Come to the Methodist this time, Mr. Jones”, said Mrs. Buff. “Our minister will make a special effort this morning, for in just one week Mr. Dayton the evangelist is to begin the revival meetings.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Buff,” said Delbert, “guess I’ll do that.”

So saying he made his way to the Methodist church that morning to listen to what proved to be a very spiritual address, and to music which was certainly soul-stirring. After announcing cottage prayer meetings for every evening that week, and the beginning of revival meetings for the following Sunday, and again asking the congregation to join with the choir in singing another hymn, Rev. Towne proceeded to deliver a very impassioned sermon on the text, “I am the vine and ye are the branches.” At the conclusion of his address, the reverend gentleman, in order to find out the character of the congregation before him just a little

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more definitely than his memory would serve him, applied this time-honored test:

“Now, beloved, let all who are saved rise—all who are under the drippings of the cross—all who are washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

To the complete dumbfounding of the minister, of many good Methodists, and especially of Mandy Buff, there sat Delbert Jones, the school teacher. Could it be so! He, once a student in a theological seminary, and not saved by the blood shed on Calvary! What did it mean?

After services, Rev. Towne approached Delbert with these words:

“Beg your pardon, Brother Jones, but at what hour do you have dinner on Sunday?”

“Not till two o’clock, Elder Towne.”

“Would it be asking too much of you, then, to meet me here in the church at one? I should be much interested in having a short talk with you.”

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“Certainly not, Elder, I’ll be here”, said Delbert. And he was.

After returning at one o’clock and seating themselves comfortably in the rear of the church, Elder Towne began in this wise:

“Would you object to telling me why you did not rise on invitation after the sermon this morning, Brother Jones?”

“Certainly not, Elder! Simply because your statements were too bloody. Blood fills me with horror these days, Elder Towne, not with religion.”

“Probably, then, Brother Jones, you don’t believe that the blood of Jesus saves men from their sins.”

“I would not say that, Elder. I believe that it has saved and that it still saves men by the thousand all over the world. But, personally, I have outgrown this ancient idea. Of course, if blood sacrifice appeals to a man and causes him to quit sinning and to go leading a decent life, it certainly saves

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him, and I shall never depreciate any religion that makes men better; but personally, though once I accepted the blood-washing principle, I have long since outgrown it. With me now, the *life* of Jesus has more to do with saving from sin than does his *blood*."

"You're a deluded man! You're lost, Jones!

"And what is your idea about revival meetings?"

"A revival may be all right and a good thing in its place. Even church people often need reviving, you know. And as a means for mellowing up the stony hearts of outsiders, too, the revival meeting may be a very good thing. But I would not permit any one to join the church under the excitement of a revival, any more than I would permit a drunk man to sign a note or a contract or a deed to his farm. If the church isn't worth joining in a cool, unexcited, rational state of mind, it isn't worth joining at all."

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“I see, Brother Jones, that you do not have much use for the means which we are about to employ in our church to save men from sin.”

“I must confess I do not. By way of comparison, Elder Towne, let me say that if a man should come to me to sell a life insurance policy, and should get all excited over it; or to sell a farm, and should talk hysterically of its merits, I should look with lots of suspicion upon his proposition. When a man begins to work on my feelings, I begin to look out. We should have our wits about us when we go into a business proposition; and, Elder, it should be the same in religion.”

“Have you ever joined a Christian church, Mr. Jones?”

“I have, Elder Towne; but, as I said a moment ago, I’ve outgrown my church, which is not saying very much.”

“Jones, you’re lost! Promise me that you will attend our revival services.”

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“I cannot promise, Elder, for it would be a mere waste of time. If I should attend every night for two weeks, I should still think as I do. Then, to see others going forward under excitement to take their first step in joining the church would make me feel bad.”

“How may we help you, then?”

“I’ve already been helped, Elder, thank you—I’ve been lifted up above this thing we’re talking about, above blood and above the practice of ‘saving’ people from their sins when they’re bubbling over with excitement. If the Evangelist can spare the time, however, he might put a Bible into his pocket and come over to the school building some evening after four o’clock. If he can show me that I have not advanced to a higher plane in the Christian religion, I’ll be quick to mend my thinking.”

“You’re a lost man, Jones, but you show the right spirit. I’ll see that brother Day-

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ton calls on you. I believe he can make it clear that you have fallen. Nothing but the broken body and shed blood of Christ can save a man's soul; and a revival meeting, brother Jones, is the only way some people can be reached."

"Yes, Elder, but could not those same people who hold to the faith after the excitement is over, be induced to join the church without any revival, and the church be thus saved from the charge of getting its members by first paralyzing their intellectual powers?"

And, after putting this query, Delbert Jones hastened back to Buff's.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRIENDLY ENEMY

Many sighs and regrets went up after services that Sunday morning, and a vast deal of complaining was heard on every hand. Not a few remarked that it was a big mistake on the part of Elder Towne to apply such a test as he did at this particular time. He should have known where Mr. Jones stood long before this. If he had, he surely would not have advertised to the public that Mr. Jones had any misgivings.

"Here we are on the verge of a revival meeting," said a kind heart, "and with the head of our school not in sympathy with us in the fight. It's a great misfortune. We had counted heavily on Mr. Jones to help us with the young people. Instead of help,

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he will hinder, for 'He who is not for us is against us.'

"And," remarked the same individual, "if Maytie Ray had been here, she, too, would have kept her seat just as Mr. Jones did. I tell you it's a great misfortune that all the school teachers of the land don't come out on the side of religion. Maytie has always been a great church worker, and still she can't rise to her feet and announce to the young people who look to her for an example that she is saved by the blood of Jesus."

Morning preaching services in the Methodist church at Lesterville are always followed by Sunday school; and the Bible Class had in it that Sunday three individuals who had more than their share of sorrow over the unfortunate incident of the day, as they considered it. Georgia Dale, who teaches a district school a mile and a quarter west of town; Della Beach, who clerks in Darnell's general store; and Mrs. Helen Duke were

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bent on making an investigation as to the character of Delbert Jones' religion. Was he a Christian or was he a heathen or what was he? After Sunday School was over, they tarried for a few minutes to plan their campaign.

It fell to Georgia Dale to call upon the Methodist mothers represented in Mr. Jones' room at school. She had eight to visit, and did the work with dignity and good sense. The question she invariably asked was, "What does Mr. Jones say or do at school to show that he has regard for religion?" The one answer she always received was substantially this, "On Monday mornings the two rooms come together for what they call chapel exercises. Mr. Jones always reads a passage from the Bible (usually one of the Psalms), and offers a short prayer. Then, with Maytie Ray at the organ, the school usually sings two or three school songs. One child from each

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room then gives a recitation, or something of the sort, after which the younger children return to the primary room and all take up the work of the day. Good conduct, kindness, courtesy, and fair play characterizes every thing that is done; and utmost good will prevails between him and all his pupils."

Before Georgia Dale had completed her canvass, Mrs. Helen Duke had gone to Mandy Buff, who had this to say for the teacher:

"Why, Mr. Jones is always kind and good-natured and jolly. Nothing seems ever to provoke him, and he is always very grateful for every kindness rendered and always willing and anxious to do William or me a good turn.

"He doesn't use tobacco or liquor or indulge in profane language or tell any vile stories, so William says, either here or down at the stores. If he ever says anything about anybody, it's always something good. I

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don't believe you could hire him to carry a bad report concerning any one. Before he goes to his rooms after supper he nearly always plays on the organ and sings. And I don't believe he ever goes to bed at night without reading from the Bible and saying his prayers. Of course, you must not say anything about this so's he'd ever get to hear that I told you, for he might think I go to his door sometimes to eave-drop. But, of course, you know, Mrs. Duke, that I wouldn't do such a thing.

“No, William an' me think he's just perfection. I tell you, Mrs. Duke, you could have knocked me right over with a feather last Sunday when he didn't rise at church. If he can't go to Heaven when he dies, I don't know what'll become of some of the rest of us who make a profession of religion! But then I don't suppose he can till he bows at the cross and is washed in the blood. 'There's no other way under heaven

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whereby men may be saved.' But he's an awful good man, Mr. Jones is!"

In this connection it should be said that no one but Rev. Towne knew that Delbert Jones had ever been baptized. But the fact that he claimed no longer to be under the blood would have made it just as bad anyway, if not worse.

The next individual called upon was Maytie Ray. Della Beach had consented to interview Miss Ray, and to do so that same Sunday. Della called her up and made known that she desired to see her at some convenient time, whereupon Miss Ray invited her to come over at four o'clock. At the hour set, Miss Beach was on hand.

"May I ask you, Maytie," began Della, "what you know about the attitude of Mr. Jones to religion?"

"And may I inquire why you ask?" responded Miss Ray.

At this, Della related the embarrassing in-

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cident which concluded the morning services at the Methodist church, and referred to the sensation which it caused. She also lamented that such a thing should transpire right in the face of what deserved to be a great and successful revival meeting.

"And why should you come to me for information regarding Mr. Jones' religion?" asked Maytie.

"Some of the church people want to know whether he is for or against Christ in his conversation and life, and it is thought you know him better than does anyone else here."

"Of course, I don't know as to that," replied Maytie. "Personally, I think it a mistake on the part of ministers to frame a question in the way you say Rev. Towne did. Only think of a person 'washed in blood!' Of course, it is only a figure. I understand that. But think of the picture which that figure brings to mind."

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“But,” spoke Miss Beach with some emphasis, “is Mr. Jones *for* Christ or *against* him?”

“What I know about Mr. Jones’ religion is this, Della, and you may take it for what it is worth. In the first place, he is a student of all the great religions. He sees beauty and real religion to a certain extent in them all. But I have heard him say that he is partial to Christianity. He regards it as the greatest of all the great religions.

“He testifies in church, and takes part in the singing. He conducts devotional exercises in the school, and his language and conduct and manners, so far as I can see, are above reproach. Utmost good will prevails between him and his pupils.

“I couldn’t cite the first thing derogatory to Mr. Jones. So, in answer to your question, I should say his influence is on the side of religion. As to just what construction

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he places on the Bible and Christianity, I can't say."

"Do you suppose he's a Catholic?"

"I have no idea he is, Della. In fact, I know he is not. Yet I should not be surprised to hear that, by striking an average, as we might say, he has just as much respect for Catholic Christianity as for Protestant."

So much Della learned from Maytie Ray, and no more. After a lively chat on a variety of subjects, she returned to her home with a feeling that she both knew and did not know about Delbert Jones' attitude to Christianity.

The three women arranged for a conference with their minister, Mr. Towne, at his residence at eight o'clock the next Wednesday evening; for this investigation was not made without the knowledge of the pastor. And, when the women met in Rev. Towne's study to tell what they knew, it was with

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much interest that the reverend gentleman listened to their reports.

“Your statements agree on these points,” said the minister: “Mr. Jones is a gentleman of pleasing personality and kindness of heart. His language is pure and his life exemplary; his influence, on the side of religion. All that he needs, sisters, is this wonderful salvation which you and I enjoy. His life is faultless, so far as we know, but Adam’s finger prints are upon him, and only the blood of Jesus can wash them away and keep him in the straight and narrow path. Mr. Jones is laboring under the delusion that he has risen above the blood of the Savior. Now, let us drop this matter right where it is, and say nothing more about it. Mr. Jones has consented to do all any man can do. He has consented to receive our evangelist. Mr. Dayton will fix him up, I’ll warrant. He’s a specialist at curing the ills of the soul.”

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Delbert Jones was soon apprised of what was taking place in the community, and reasoned with himself that Maytie Ray might know even more than he did about the investigation that was going on. Accordingly, after school Monday evening, Delbert went to the primary room to see that faithful little co-laborer of his; not, however, to ask her to divulge any secrets.

"Some of the good sisters over here at the Methodist church are trying to find out how I am behaving myself here in Lester-ville, Miss Ray," said Delbert to Maytie, looking at her closely. "I didn't come in to ask you to divulge anything though, and don't want you to. I understand, however, that you could if you would."

"How do you know that I'm advised of any such thing, Mr. Jones?" asked Maytie in some surprise.

"You told me so."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jones! Why, I

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never said a word to you about any such thing."

"I don't know what you'd call it," said Delbert, "but you certainly told me right here less than two minutes ago."

"How?"

"By your manner."

"You must have a sixth sense, Mr. Jones," said Maytie.

"Don't know what you'd call it."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Maytie.

"Nothing! What I have thought, I have thought; and what I have said, I have said," responded Delbert in a manner which showed Maytie that he was not worrying. A clear conscience needs no comforter; a guilty conscience, no accuser.

"They're going to do something themselves, though," continued Delbert. "They are going to send their evangelist over here to the building after school some evening to

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help me see things in their way. They wish to draw me back to the plane of blood sacrifice; and also to show me, I suppose, that the revival meeting is a proper channel through which to bring people into the church."

"Their motive is good and kind, to say the least," spoke Maytie.

"And I appreciate such a spirit, I assure you, Miss Ray. One should not be blind to kindness, or ungrateful to missions of good intent."

"Do you know, Mr. Jones, I'd like awfully well to ask a question about what you just said?"

"Ask it!"

"You say the evangelist is coming over here to help you see things as they see them. I have some difficulties with church doctrines myself, Mr. Jones, though I have never dared mention them to a living soul—not

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even to mother or to any of my brothers or to Elder Black, our minister."

"Well, I'm a 'living soul', Miss Ray, so be careful. Better save your questions and ask them of Mr. Dayton when he comes."

"My, but I'd be afraid to. Why, he'd think I'm a terrible girl—terribly wicked to question some of the things I do! Possibly the things I question you could set right in my mind yourself, and I'd not have to advertise my misgivings."

"You may tell me, Miss Ray, if you wish. I desire to say about myself, however, that I have no trouble whatever over the great essentials of religion, that is, over what I call essentials." And Maytie Ray proceeded to tell to her trusted school partner what she had never dared tell even to her nearest relatives.

"No, Miss Ray, I could not change your views on any of these points, and especially on blood sacrifice and revival meetings. The

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shedding of the blood of a sheep or a goat or a dove or an ox or a human being to obtain the forgiveness of an angry God is a practice as old as history, and common to several world religions; and what the forefathers of any race have believed for a few thousand years it is hard for their children to outgrow. Revival meetings, too, of a nerve-racking kind, have been in the world for a long time, and have a pretty firm grip of approval on the minds of lots of people; but they have degenerated of late into a sort of money-making scheme. Still it is hard to rise up above such a long established practice.

“No, Miss Ray,” Delbert repeated, “I could not change your views on any of these things. When the evangelist calls on me here in the school, I shall invite you into my room if he is willing. Would you come?”

“I should be pleased to do so, Mr. Jones. Thank you!”

CHAPTER X.

DAYTON TO ATTACK JONES

On Saturday afternoon of that week, Rev. Towne and two of the pillars of the Methodist church met Mr. Dayton at Wheaton and escorted him to Lesterville, where two Sunday services were to be held on the morrow. Whatever arrangements might be made afterward, and however much his company might be divided up among the brethren later, Rev. Towne was to entertain Mr. Dayton over Sunday. For some reason, which may be known to ministers, the evangelist was not early made aware of the fact that an investigation had been under progress during the week and had been terminated only a few days previous to his arrival.

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Out of justice to Delbert Jones, it must be said that he really and truly loved to attend revival meetings. He always had. There is always something splendidly helpful about the music. Music always touched the right spot in Delbert Jones—the melody, however, and not the words, for the words usually make the singer out to be either a babe or a sheep or a lamb or something else distasteful to one of his views. So Delbert would have gone Sunday to the Methodist church to hear the singing, but he did not intend to be made a spectacle of again right away if he could help it. It did not matter, therefore, what Rev. Black was going to talk about that day, the Baptist church was the place for Delbert to go anyway.

With the Methodists, the cottage prayer meetings of the past weeks had had their effect, and the frequent drills of the choir gave assurance that there would be plenty of good music. * * *

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The splendid preparation for the revival was sensed by the evangelist as soon as he crossed the threshold of the church door. How brave is a minister and how confident of success when he knows other helpers are to take a lively interest. The enthusiasm put into Mr. Dayton's first sermon was met by encouraging "amens" from the zealous brethren, and by inspiring music from the choir, and had the effect fairly to lift the audience off their seats.

At the conclusion of the morning sermon, when the audience seemed all athrob with enthusiasm, the evangelist remarked:

"Brethren, I want every Christian in the church to rise this morning and testify to the goodness of God and the assurance of salvation. It matters not how many are speaking at once. Jesus can hear."

"Who will be first?" asked Mr. Dayton.

At this, more than a dozen were on their feet, half of them waiting, the other half

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talking. Soon the whole audience seemed rising at once, some to speak and others to drop to their knees. Such a sight and such a confusion of tongues! Some were talking, some singing, some praying, some crying "amen" at the top of their voices. We do not refer to the event, however, to impugn any one's motives or to ridicule; but as one of the phenomena of human nature which science long ago answered. But, whatever its explanation, it meant the right thing to the evangelist. Such a condition, thought he, must bring forth "abundant fruitage." When all were through their testimonies, the brethren were asked each to bring one other person to the evening service.

"Let us fill the seats and the aisles this evening," said Mr. Dayton, "and have them standing up all around the room. The Lord is going to bless our efforts I know."

With this, the choir sang beautifully a

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closing hymn; the benediction was pronounced; and those who did not belong to the Sunday School, or care to remain, returned to their homes to tell their neighbors about the splendid sermon and wonderful music.

* * *

The evangelist was not disappointed with the attendance in the evening. Song service began at seven o'clock as announced, and the people crowded in from village and country till the commodious room was full to overflowing. A choice variety of sacred music was on the program—a duet, a quartette, and a cornet solo; while much of the old-time congregational singing was provided, which, after all, is what most enthuses a meeting of this kind and brings “results.”

After a rousing address on John 3:16, the evangelist requested all Christians to come forward who desired to reconsecrate themselves to Jesus Christ. The floor near the

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altar soon supported an immense load of humanity, and the air became astir with pleadings and sobbings and "amens" and shouts of "Glory to Jesus."

* * *

This was the first Sunday in Lesterville that Delbert Jones had gone twice to the Baptist church; and, whether others thought of it or not, Maytie Ray did, and could scarcely refrain from smiling at Delbert when he took a seat and glanced up at the choir where she sat, for she understood the circumstances which kept him away from the Methodist.

When services were over, Delbert tarried a little to do, or try to do, what he never before had attempted, that is, to escort Miss Ray home from church. After the usual informal greetings and cordial indulgences so common in country churches, the people began to return to their homes. Delbert and Maytie paired off as naturally

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as though it had been planned that way. And where did they agree to go but to the Methodist church to "take in the situation", for revival meetings usually extend a little farther into the evening than regular services do.

To the pleasure and comfort of both, they could get no farther than the inner door. But here they could see the evangelist very comfortably and see and hear everything that was going on inside. Before the demonstration was over around the altar, Delbert and Maytie took their departure.

"Have you met the evangelist yet, Mr. Jones?" inquired Maytie as they left the church.

"No."

"I suppose he'll think you a heathen, won't he, when you ask him to explain some of the things we were talking about the other day after school?" asked Maytie.

"I suppose so", responded Delbert.

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“And would you join the Methodist church if he should convince you that orthodox Christianity is, after all, good enough for anybody?”

“Hardly! There are eighty-seven other Christian denominations that would want to tell me the best way of salvation. I shouldn’t expect ever to find time to study them all and make an intelligent decision till I get to the next world.”

“And, when you get there, do you expect to hear so much arguing over creeds and doctrines?” said Maytie as they were nearing the house.

But at this, the front door opened and a near neighbor took her departure. She had been spending the time with Delvina Ray, who rarely ever goes to church of an evening. On Maytie’s invitation, Delbert stepped inside to greet Mrs. Ray, with whom he always liked to talk. In a few

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minutes, however, he bade the ladies good night and returned to Buff's.

* * *

When services at the Methodist were over and the two ministers had got home and settled down into comfortable chairs and had discussed enthusiastically the prospect for a great revival, Rev. Towne remarked to the evangelist:

"Brother Dayton, we have at the head of our school this year a mighty fine young man who has spent a year in a theological seminary preparing for the ministry; but who, for some reason, has drifted away from his noble ambition, and now seems to be drifting away from the church of Jesus Christ itself."

"What seems wrong with the fellow?"

"I don't know. I learned of his deluded ideas only a week ago, when in response to my inquiry as to what we might do for him, he remarked, 'You might have the evan-

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gelist put his Bible into his pocket and come over to the school building some evening after four o'clock.' I suppose he thought it would be a quiet and strictly secret place for a conference with you."

"I shall be glad to go to the young fellow's relief," said the evangelist. "I know what's wrong. He went to some seminary full of his youthful faith, and the instructors tried to mix in some of this new theology, and it unsettled his ideas and made him disgusted with everything. I don't wonder at it. Nearly all our higher institutions of learning are becoming hotbeds of infidelity. Our magazines and newspapers and many of our pulpits, even, are rampant with the poison of liberality. The young man has my sympathy, and I can be as gentle with him as a father could. I just like to get hold of such cases."

"When do you think," inquired Rev. Towne, "it will be best to go and see him?"

"The sooner the better. He probably has

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influence over many of the young people in his school and the community and we can't afford to let him be indifferent to the revival."

"Yes, he's well liked by his pupils; and, in fact, by everyone who knows him. Suppose we go over and see him to-morrow night after school. I'll go with you and make you acquainted, and then leave you alone with him. He would feel freer to talk with you alone, I surmise."

"Very well, then," replied the evangelist. "If it will be convenient for him, we'll go over to-morrow evening after school. You see him about the matter to-morrow, brother Towne. The sooner the better, you know, under the circumstances."

"Certainly!" replied the Methodist preacher. And, with this understanding, the reverend gentlemen both retired for the evening after the strain of two heavy church services.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST BATTLE

It was on his way to the postoffice, Monday morning shortly after eight o'clock, that Rev. Towne chanced to meet Delbert Jones. As they approached each other, the elder inquired:

"Would it be convenient for you to receive Mr. Dayton, our evangelist, after four o'clock this evening, Mr. Jones? He desires to meet you and help you if he can."

"I should be pleased to make the acquaintance of Mr. Dayton, Brother Towne, but he would only be wasting time to try to change my views."

"What, you don't think your case a hopeless one, do you?"

"From your standpoint, yes. But if Mr.

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Dayton considers it a part of his Christian duty to minister to me, I am probably equally under obligations to hear him."

"You are too good a man, Mr. Jones, to be tied up to such a theory as you entertain. We need you in the church. We need your help. We need your influence."

"But self-respect forbids me joining your church, Elder Towne, thinking as I do now."

"This higher Christianity idea of yours, Mr. Jones, is all a delusion. The evangelist desires to set you right."

"That is kind of him. Tell him I shall be pleased to meet him," replied Delbert.

After returning home from the postoffice, Rev. Towne remarked to the evangelist:

"Brother Dayton, that matter is all arranged. Now, we must bring that fellow back to our way of thinking if possible, and the primary teacher too. To get them into the church would be to get twenty more

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young people who would follow their example."

While the two ministers were thus conversing, Delbert Jones was informing Miss Ray on what was to happen at four o'clock.

"If I could myself just get this matter of religion settled in a satisfactory way, Mr. Jones," said Maytie, "I'd be the happiest girl in the world."

"Unless the evangelist objects, I shall call you in, Miss Ray, as we both entertain about the same views; and if you come, you must be just as free to help on the discussion as myself. We shall test the evangelist as much as he does us before we are through with him if we do the fair thing by ourselves in the argument."

The hour of four came, the children were dismissed, and the ministers appeared with Rev. Towne leading the way into the school-room. Delbert advanced with his hand extended; and, after greeting Rev. Towne,

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was introduced to Mr. Dayton—a short, thick, heavy-built, smooth-shaven man, probably fifty years old, and of dark complexion. After a cordial hand-shake, the exchange of little civilities, and a short visit, Rev. Towne excused himself and withdrew, leaving the evangelist alone with the teacher.

“Why is it, Mr. Jones, that the vicarious atonement is no longer acceptable to you?” inquired Mr. Dayton. “I understand, too, that the primary teacher is not willing to accept the blood of Christ. What is wrong? Education and religion should go hand in hand.”

“What you say is true, Mr. Dayton, but personally I’ve risen above the blood sacrifice idea. What you say about the primary teacher is also quite true. Miss Ray and I entertain many of the same views, and she will want to see you herself before you leave the village.”

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“If that is the case, why not invite her in, Mr. Jones?”

Now, this is just what Delbert wanted him to say. So he forthwith brought in his lady friend, and introduced the evangelist to the most brilliant and charming young woman of Lesterville, as Delbert was fast coming to regard her.

“If you teachers,” began the evangelist, “will now tell me what is troubling you, I will see what I can do.”

“Nothing is troubling us, Mr. Dayton,” said Delbert. “When you stated a few moments ago, however, that ‘Education and religion should go hand in hand,’ you uttered a splendid truth.”

“Well, don’t they?” inquired the evangelist.

“Not if I read the newspapers and magazines aright, and the discussions between our great educators and theologians. For the past several years, Mr. Dayton, lively skirm-

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ishes have been going on between education and religion. This fact, however, had nothing to do with the origin and growth of my doubts. My misgivings were matters which arose wholly out of my own experience while in the struggle to secure an education."

"What was the trouble, Mr. Jones?"

"I will give you just the briefest account of my high school experience as it touches matters of religion. I desire to say at the outstart that I was reared in a Bible home. That is, I was under the influence of Bible teaching in my earlier boyhood days. Father and mother were Baptists. I well remember my mother's pictorial Bible. I well remember the stories that were told me when a boy. I well remember, too, the nature of a child's faith—father and mother say it is so, so it must be so."

"O, for the faith of a child," sighed the evangelist.

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“Indeed, I did not know till I started to high school,” continued Delbert, “that anybody had any particular fault to find with my mother’s Bible, or her religion. For thirteen years my young moral nature had fed upon it. For thirteen years I had been trained in Baptist ideas, as it were. Why, mother’s religion had become a part of me just as much as a hand or a foot!”

“O, for the faith of our mothers!” again sighed the evangelist.

“And I shall never forget the blows that came to my boyish faith. The first, as I just intimated, was in the high school, in the science department.

“Now, geology was not on my course, but I overheard another pupil reciting on the ‘Age of the earth.’ He said that geology teaches that the earth is millions of years old. The teacher asked him how scientists know this to be true. The boy’s explanation was so good that I had to respect it.

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When I got home I went straight to my Bible and found, as I thought, that God created the world 4004 years before Christ and in six days. Maybe you think I was not shocked! The very idea that education and religion did not agree!”

While Mr. Jones was thus rehearsing his troubles, the evangelist was taking copious notes, ostensibly in order to be ready to make a thorough and definite reply to the teacher's objections.

“Some time later in the physics class”, resumed Delbert, “we were discussing ‘inertia’, when one of the girls asked the teacher what the effect would be if the earth should suddenly stop turning on its axis. The teacher replied that it would burn up instantly because of the heat it would generate in the process of stopping. Then I recalled how Joshua caused the earth to stand still while he should kill his enemies. These were sore days for me, when two of

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my favorite friends, the Bible and education, fell to quarreling." And the evangelist kept on writing.

"At another time, in the same class," Delbert continued, "we had for our lesson the subject of 'refraction.' The text-book, after setting forth the principle, suggested the popular experiment with the prism, which we performed. It was also explained that, in accordance with the same principle of 'refraction', the sun's rays in shining through the rain produce the rainbow. Of course, I was shocked again. I recalled how my Bible virtually stated that there was no rainbow till after the flood (2348 before Christ) when God placed that beautiful ribbon in the sky as a seal to his promise never again to drown the earth. Could it be, thought I, that light and water were any different during the centuries before the flood than after, or that this law of nature was not then operative.

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“What should I do, continue to go to school or quit? Education and the Bible were continually falling out, and the Bible seemed always to get the worst of it. I even began to half-way doubt that the whale swallowed Jonah, and had him under process of digestion for three days without injury to Jonah.”

Maytie Ray did not care to sit there like a dummy, nor did she like to see the evangelist wielding his pencil vociferously without saying a word, so she asked:

“Do you think, Brother Dayton, it is worth while to teach such absurd things in this enlightened age? Of course, parents may succeed in making their trustful children believe such stories when they are babies; but when they become older and acquire some education, will they not come to regard these stories as mere nonsense? And, what is a thousand times worse, are they not

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very liable to lose respect for all religion and drift to infidelity?"

"I have made note of that point, Miss Ray," replied the evangelist, with a wise look in his face.

It had now become evident to Delbert and Maytie that what the evangelist intended to say he would say later, so Delbert went on:

"No, higher education and most of the sectarian religions that I know anything about, at any rate, do not go hand in hand. I believe in education, however, and I believe in religion. But the pride of my heart is this higher Christianity which I have discovered, for it contains a lofty conception of God and is capable of standing against all the storms of education.

"How, for instance, could I ever believe, Mr. Dayton, that God, the greatest and busiest being in the universe, ever descended to the trivial business of telling Moses how to make perfumery; or that he hardened the

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heart of Pharaoh so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of Egypt and then turned around and punished Pharaoh severely for not letting them go; or that God ordered Moses to lie to the king in order to get them away from bondage; or that he told the Israelites to borrow all they could from the Egyptians and take it away with them when they went; or that God endorsed polygamy or slavery or took part in the bloody wars of the Old Testament; or that he instructed Jehu to murder all the house of Ahab? How am I to believe these things about God?

“Brother Dayton,” continued Delbert, “you preachers tell us that the Bible is God’s word cover to cover, and yet I read these words in the fourteenth chapter of Deuteronomy:

“‘Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself; thou shalt give it unto the stranger

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that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien.'

"In the twenty-first chapter of Deuteronomy, I read these words: 'If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not harken unto them; then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place, and they shall say unto the elders of his city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voices; he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die.'

"Then, too, Brother Dayton, I don't know how to make myself believe that woman was made out of the rib of a man; or that a serpent could talk to a donkey; or that Jonah could live for three days in a whale; or that Nebuchadnezzar could eat grass like an ox

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for seven years. Of course, Brother Dayton, if you taught that these were only Bible myths, that would be a different thing. But you preachers say the Bible is God's word cover to cover. And you are not helping us, Brother Dayton, not helping us to understand these troublesome things."

"You see, my dear young people," replied the evangelist, "the objections which you urge are not superficial. You have thought long and arduously on these points, and they have developed in your minds deep-seated objections to the religion which I represent. The only wise course for me to pursue, therefore, is to make note of these things which vex you so and discuss them with Rev. Towne, for whom I am laboring, and then reply to you in careful explanation. You two young people are educated and thoughtful; and a shilly-shally, off-hand reply would do more harm than good. A poor hasty answer is often worse than no answer at all."

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"Your reply to Mr. Jones is perfectly splendid, Mr. Dayton," said Maytie. "I am very glad you have such excellent judgment with regard to answering his very troublesome questions."

"That's all right, Brother Dayton," said Delbert. "I like to see a man think before he speaks. I have more respect then for his words. The point I would make, you see, is this, the Bible is not God's word, cover to cover. It is often neither good science nor good sense."

"But bad leads to worse, Brother Dayton," continued Delbert, "and I find the Bible contradicting itself in many, many places. If I should tell you that my neighbor has just painted his house a rich brown color, and you should go by and find it pure white; or if I should tell you that the tree out here in our yard is a maple, when you can plainly see it is a horse chestnut; and should keep up that sort of thing very long,

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you would soon come to regard me as unreliable. To my way of thinking, the following passages from the Bible prove beyond all doubt that it is *not* God's word cover to cover—that it is *not* a perfect or infallible book.

“In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, we read these words, ‘and it came to pass after these things, that *God did tempt Abraham*’; while in the first chapter of James, it says, ‘Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, *neither tempteth he any man.*’

“In the first chapter of Ecclesiastes, we read, ‘*The earth abideth forever,*’ while in the third chapter of Second Peter it says, ‘*The earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.*’

“In the second chapter of Second Kings occur these words, ‘*Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven*’; but the third chap-

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ter of John declares that, '*No man hath ascended up to heaven but the Son of Man.*'

"Then in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis, we read these words, '*I have seen God face to face*'; while in the fourth chapter of First John we find that, '*No man hath seen God at any time.*'

"Do you wonder, Mr. Dayton," said Maytie, "that educated people who read the Bible intelligently are given to doubting?"

"My dear young people," said the evangelist, "I only repeat what I said a moment ago—I shall confer with Brother Towne before replying. If convenient for you both, I will call again to-morrow at this time."

Mr. Jones and Miss Ray assented, thanked Mr. Dayton for all his pains, and the evangelist made his return to the Methodist parsonage. The teachers tarried a little longer.

"Mr. Jones, the world is full of people easy to convince," remarked Miss Ray.

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“Everything they hear they believe at once and implicitly. It never dawns upon them that there may be another side. Isn’t it strange?”

“Yes,” replied Delbert, “and this disposition shows itself nowhere more than in religion. In evidence of this, we have on the one hand the sectarian clergy supporting Bible ‘infallibility’; and on the other, infidelity ready to overthrow the whole thing because of certain imperfections. We will have patience, however, with both these extremes, Miss Ray, if we are wise, because they give us both sides of the story and put us in a fair way to find the truth.”

“But” inquired Maytie, “don’t you think that all easily-convinced folks are alike destructive to the Bible, Mr. Jones, whether on the one hand they be over-zealous Christians, or on the other ranting infidels? Indeed, I have read somewhere that *‘The worst ene-*

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mies of the Bible are its short-sighted friends.' "

"True, Miss Ray. And I maintain that those who give ear to both sides of the Bible controversy as it is carried on between sectarian preachers and impartial scholars, and those only, are in a position to be real constructionists. And fair-minded men everywhere are agreed that the constructive attitude to religion and the affirmative stand for the Bible, wherever possible, are the things that should be emphasized. It is not what we don't believe that will help the world, but what we do believe; not the errors which men have unintentionally inserted or ignorantly translated into the Bible that the world needs most to know about; but its great, indestructible, and universally accepted truths."

"But you must confess, Mr. Jones, that you said much about the bad in the Old Testament when you were talking to the evan-

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gelist, and nothing about the good and true and acceptable."

"In that discussion, Miss Ray, it was my purpose to take the position of the thinking men of our time, leaving Mr. Dayton to do what Mr. Towne said he would, that is, help us see things in the right light."

"Oh, I am not taking exception to what you said, Mr. Jones. You treated Mr. Dayton in all fairness. But I was just wondering if he would get the idea that you have no use for the Old Testament."

"Well, now, I wonder," said Delbert, "if he went away with that impression. I would certainly have no one think I am not a friend of the Bible. That book is the source of more comfort and joy to me than any other, for the wings of error have borne down upon them through the countless ages great and indestructible religious truths."

"And yet," remarked Miss Ray, "according to a statement you made the other day,

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it is not *a* book either, is it; but a *set* of books or a book of books?"

"That is quite true, Miss Ray. Scholars are pretty well agreed that the books of the Old Testament, beginning with Amos and extending down through the centuries to Enoch II. were written at various times from the eighth century B. C. to the first B. C., and finally collected and put together under one binding."

"Don't you know, Mr. Jones, that a great many people think that the Old Testament, as it is now composed, but in a different language, was in some mysterious way virtually handed down from heaven by God or placed under a great rock; and not that it is a lot of records collected here and there by many men, culled over, compared, as many thrown out as they pleased, and the rest finally put together by human erring creatures, as you were telling me the other day?"

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“I know, Miss Ray, that the truth about the matter is seldom explained. I know that sectarian ministers commonly inject into it, and throw about the Bible as much mystery and superstition as credulous people will bear. This they think will inspire a holier regard for it, and frighten the reader out of eliminating its errors. They disregard the Scripture where it says, ‘The truth shall make you free.’ But for all that, Miss Ray, the Old Testament, even, is a wonderful book in spite of the exaggerated stories told about it, and a book worthy of a place in every home. Where would you go, for instance, and find better literature and nobler thought and better spiritual food than we find in some of the Psalms? Listen to the twenty-third:

“ ‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul, he leadeth me

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in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' Such confidence in God! And it was expressed centuries before Christ.

"Then, note the following beautiful thought:

" 'Bless the Lord, oh, my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, oh my soul; and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.'

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“Listen to the following beautiful and sensible prayer:

“ ‘Search me, O, God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.’

“There are hundreds of beautiful gems in the Psalms of David, beautiful not only for the thought they contain and the spiritual enrichment they afford, but for the language—the literature. In Isaiah we find these words concerning the greatness of God:

“ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.’

“Here, too, is a bit of sensible advice:

“ ‘Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return

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unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him.' ”

Delbert Jones and Maytie Ray now went to their homes, Miss Ray having much regard for Delbert's religious judgment. But when the evangelist had made his return to the Methodist parsonage, the following discussion took place:

“How did you succeed with the teachers, Brother Dayton?” queried Rev. Towne.

“Well, sir, sit right down here and I'll tell you all about it in a nutshell. That man Jones attacks the Bible from a scientific standpoint, and finds all manner of fault with the Old Testament conception of God. Besides he points out many Bible contradictions for the purpose of showing that it is not an infallible book.”

“How did he feel when you got through with him?”

“I made no replies. Left him just as I

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found him. Promised to see them again tomorrow night.”

“What can you tell them with regard to the scientific features of the Bible, Mr. Dayton?”

“Only thing I can do is to own up that the Bible is not a scientific book.”

“What about God as represented in the Old Testament?” asked Mr. Towne.

“He was no God at all”, came the prompt reply.

“And what about the contradictions?”

“They’re there, Brother Towne, as you and I both know.”

“Yes, but what are we going to do about the matter?” asked Rev. Towne. “By the way, does he attack the whole Bible or just the Old Testament?”

“Just the Old Testament, Brother Towne. Now, if I myself return to explain the matter to them, I shall own up that Mr. Jones’ position is well taken—that the Old Testa-

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ment is largely a man-made book. Higher criticism, as they call it, makes this the only tenable position."

"I thought, though, Brother Dayton," replied Rev. Towne, half jokingly, "that you remarked only last evening that you'd be glad to go to the young fellow's relief, that you 'just liked to get hold of such cases.' "

"Brother Towne, I thought of Mr. Jones as a mere boy, as it were. It is seldom difficult to answer youthful objections, you know. The churches nowadays depend almost entirely upon nervous women and the children."

"But you found Jones pretty much of a man, did you, Brother Dayton?"

"Must own up I did. But you know as well as I do, Brother Towne, that this 'Bible infallibility' talk is all nonsense."

"You settle with Jones, Brother Dayton. Of course, if he had attacked the New Test-



“But you know, as well as I do, that this talk is all nonsense!”

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ament too, he would have had to deal with me also. I'd never stand a minute for any reflection on the New Testament."

CHAPTER XII.

SECOND BATTLE

As soon as the children were dismissed Tuesday evening and off the school grounds, Miss Ray opened the door leading to the other room.

"I saw Mr. Dayton, the evangelist, across the street a few minutes ago headed for up town, Mr. Jones."

"He will soon be here, I presume," replied Delbert.

"Before he comes, I wish you would review briefly the points he is to explain," said she.

"We expect him to make it clear that the earth is only 6,000 years old, when science teaches that it is many millions; that God, to please a man by the name of Joshua, once

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caused the sun to stand still, which is scientifically absurd, to say the least; that God placed the rainbow in the sky as a seal to a certain promise, when science claims it is there in obedience to natural law.

“He is also to explain that God once gave Moses a recipe for making perfumery; that God hardened Pharoah’s heart, and then punished him because he was mean; that God once ordered Moses to lie and the Israelites to steal; that God in olden times endorsed polygamy and slavery; that it used to be common for Him to take sides in times of war; and that He instructed Jehu to murder all the house of Ahab.

“And, not only this,” continued Delbert, “but that God made woman out of the rib of a man; that for seven years Nebuchadnezzar fed on grass like an ox; and that Jonah remained uninjured for three days in the stomach of a big fish.

“Of course, Miss Ray, I am not question-

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ing the power of God. I am questioning the probability of all such stories. Because God had power to do these things is not to say he did them.

“But, in addition to this,” said Delbert, “Mr. Dayton should explain how, according to an early passage of scripture, God tempted Abraham, while in a later passage it is said he never tempted anyone; how the earth is to abide forever, but according to a later passage is to be burned up; how Elijah went up into heaven, and later how no man ever ascended to heaven; and how in Deuteronomy a man saw God face to face, and still the statement be true in a later age that ‘No man hath seen God at any time.’ ”

“Well,” said Maytie, “the evangelist has a big job on his hands, but—”

“Just a minute, Miss Ray!

“Come right in, Brother Dayton!”

The evangelist had arrived. The teachers were cordial; and Mr. Dayton, very smiling.

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Little unnecessary time, however, was spent on preliminaries.

“These December days are short—the sun will soon be down. I presume we had best go right to our subject,” said the man in the long black coat.

“Now, my dear young people, I presume I have in store for you something of a surprise. I presume you expect me to make some kind of reply to your question of last evening, but I shall do no such thing. The day is past when the Old Testament can be defended as a perfect book. But we have no need of defending it. Did not Christ say he came to fulfill the law—to make it full or complete? Did he not say, ‘Behold all things become new!’ No, my dear young people, the Old Testament is no longer binding on us except as it repeats itself in the New.”

“Is that good Methodist doctrine, Mr. Dayton?” inquired Maytie.

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"It is a part of the unwritten doctrine of every church that is entitled to the respect of thinking people, Miss Ray," the gentleman replied.

"But," said Delbert, "I find these imperfections reaching over into the New Testament also, Brother Dayton. For instance:

"With regard to the childhood of Jesus, you will recall that Luke says his parents took him to Jerusalem soon after his birth, and then to Nazareth in Galilee; while Matthew tells us that the parents took him immediately after his birth and the visit of the Magi down into Egypt. It was some time before they returned to Nazareth. Both accounts cannot possibly be true."

"I don't just recall that point, Mr. Jones," responded the evangelist, "but I shall look it up."

"Then, in Mark's Gospel," continued Delbert, "we find that Jesus went immediately after his baptism into the wilderness,

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where he remained forty days. But John relates that on the third day after Jesus' baptism, he attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Nothing is said about any wilderness or any temptation. Of course, one of these accounts must be false, for Jesus could not have been in two different places at the same time.

“But, Mr. Dayton, if any record could have been kept straight, it seems to me that it might have been that short inscription on the cross. Although Matthew says these were the words, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews; but Mark says, ‘The King of the Jews’; and Luke gives it, ‘This is the King of the Jews’; while John says it was, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’

“Now, Brother Dayton, what was the inscription on the cross? Do you know? Do I know? Does anybody know? Four different New Testament writers, familiar

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with the same language, tell us; but no two tell the same thing."

"But they are nearly enough agreed for all practical purposes, Mr. Jones," spoke the reverend gentlemen.

The short lull in the conversation gave Maytie an opportunity, which she did not neglect to use:

"Mr. Dayton," said she, "that isn't the point. The question is one of reliability of scripture, that is, of accuracy or perfectness. Has God worded or safeguarded the wording of the New Testament so that we can depend upon it absolutely?"

"Your question is pertinent, Miss Ray," declared Mr. Dayton. "I will make note of it. I was much in hopes, however, that the New Testament might be kept out of the controversy."

"Brother Dayton," resumed Delbert, "if the inscription on the cross could not be preserved in correct form, it does seem that the

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Lord's Prayer might have been. And yet, in all translations, Jesus is represented as telling his people to ask God not to lead them into temptation. 'Our Father, . . . lead us not into temptation,' reads the prayer. We should not presume to know what were best for God to do. He is wiser than we. If God leads us into temptation, he does it for a purpose, and we should not tell him to stop; and if he does not lead us into temptation, why, that portion of the prayer is not only superfluous but a positive insult to God as a father.

"Then, too, Brother Dayton," continued Delbert, "in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is represented as saying, 'If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.' To pursue this sort of course, Mr. Dayton, might be to plunge a man and his whole family into destitution and suffering. No one but a crazy man would do such a thing, Rev.

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Dayton, and I'll warrant Jesus never said it!

“And again,” continued Delbert, “Jesus is represented in that same sermon as saying: ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, . . . for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also. . . . If God clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you? . . . Therefore, take no thought, saying what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow.’ Would it do, Rev. Dayton, for you ministers to teach the members of your churches to live from ‘hand to mouth’—to spend their money as fast they make it—to save nothing for old age or a rainy day? Would such advice be good advice? Well, then, let us not teach people that Jesus ever said such a thing. It’s an

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insult! It is one of those defective records, Rev. Dayton. At best, it is not safe to use such symbols in discussing religion with occidental minds.

“Here is the trouble, Brother Dayton,” continued Delbert, “we do not know exactly what words were on the cross; or exactly what was the Lord’s Prayer as he prayed it; or exactly what were lots of the things spoken in those early days. What was spoken in Old Testament times was written down in languages crude and imperfect. The copying that was done, and the translations that were made were likewise unreliable. Even what Jesus said was not written down at all until a generation after his death. How, then, could we hope to have an infallible Bible?”

“I shall have to talk with Brother Towne about this matter, Mr. Jones,” said the evangelist, “before deciding just what to say to you and Miss Ray.”

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“But,” Delbert went on, “there is too much good in the Bible to throw it all away, and too much bad to teach it all as the pure word of God.”

“You do, then, own up that there is lots of good in the Bible, do you, Mr. Jones?” asked the evangelist as if a little surprised.

“Where would you go,” resumed Delbert, “to find better advice than the following, given by Jesus himself:

“‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, and eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye. Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others.’

“Then Jesus re-states the Golden Rule:

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‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’

“To those who would be religious, here is what Jesus has to say: ‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.’ ‘Ask,’ he says, ‘and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent. If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

“Then, Brother Dayton, recall that beautiful parable of the lost sheep. Jesus tells us how much joy it brings to heaven for us to establish right relations with God. Note the figure and note the language:

“ ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave

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the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.'

"God, in the teaching of Jesus, is so often referred to as the Father, and we as his children. This great family idea is beautiful. Notice in the parable of the prodigal son how Jesus plans for the return of the Prodigal to his father. To me this is one of the most attractive things in the Bible:

" 'And he said, a certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto

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them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey unto a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him unto his fields to feed swine. And he fain would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion,

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and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.'

"In Romans, Paul tells us how that even death cannot separate us from the love of God:

" 'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'

"And, Brother Dayton, we might go on indefinitely with beautiful quotations from

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the New Testament, for that splendid little volume abounds with gems of thought from Matthew to Revelation. But if I have made you to feel that I always approach the Bible, our mother's favorite book, in reverent attitude to separate as best I can the beautiful from the ugly, the true from the false, the God-honoring from the God-disgracing, I have realized no small part of my purpose; and, Mr. Dayton, be assured that I have placed in your hands the arguments of thousands of thoughtful people who maintain that the Bible is not, as sectarian preachers say, an absolutely perfect or infallible book."

"I have sufficient notes and references to reproduce your entire criticism of the New Testament, Mr. Jones. Brother Towne and I will take your arguments under consideration, and I should be pleased to get this discussion settled. Would you object to my bringing Brother Towne along with me to-

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morrow evening? He will want to come, I am sure."

"What do you say, Miss Ray?" inquired Delbert.

"I have no objections, of course, Mr. Jones," said Miss Maytie.

"Have him come, Brother Dayton! Have him come! Certainly!"

At this, the evangelist bade the teachers a friendly good night and departed. Miss Ray, however, tarried a little to ask a question:

"What topic, Mr. Jones, would cover all the objections you have brought up in your talks with Mr. Dayton?"

"You understand, of course, Miss Ray, that I have not attacked Christianity, only its text-book. I have insisted, along with our best Biblical scholars, that the Bible is not God's word cover to cover—that it is not a perfect or infallible book."

"Might the impression get out in the com-

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munity that you are an infidel, Mr. Jones?" asked Maytie with some regretfulness in her tone of voice.

"Not if the ministers are fair," replied Delbert assuringly. "I have found no fault whatever with Christianity, just with this infallibility talk about the Bible."

"Mr. Dayton bows gracefully to your criticism of the Old Testament, but in attacking even the few things you have in the New, I fear you are on dangerous ground. I expect trouble now. Don't you?"

"Not from Mr. Dayton. Rev. Towne, though, may have a fit. We shall soon find out."

* * *

Mr. Dayton went straight to the home of David Brown, with whom he was to stop for a few days; and, on arriving, immediately arranged over the 'phone for a conference after supper with Rev. Towne. Their talk necessarily was brief on account

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of the evening services at the church. When Rev. Towne called, his first question was:

“What did the teachers think, Bro. Dayton, of our confession that the Old Testament is not a perfect book?”

“Miss Ray wanted to know if that was good Methodist doctrine,” said the evangelist.

“What did you tell her?”

“I told her that it was a part of the unwritten doctrine of every church that is entitled to the respect of thinking people. But that man Jones lit into the New Testament also.”

“Just what I was afraid of, Brother Dayton. Isn't the New Testament enough better than the Old that he could afford to leave that alone?”

“Jones won't leave anything alone that is pronounced perfect when it is not.”

“What did he attack?”

“He pointed out New Testament con-

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traditions with regard to the childhood of Jesus; contradictions with regard to the movements of Christ after his baptism; contradictions with regard to the inscription on the cross; and found fault with the Lord's Prayer where we are told to ask God not to lead us into temptation. He also insisted that Jesus is falsely reported in the sermon on the mount, where he says we should have no thought for the morrow."

"Well, I'll see that fellow," said Rev. Towne with some indignation, "and give him a piece of my mind. A man that won't stand by the New Testament has no business in decent society!"

"I have their consent for you to accompany me to the school building to-morrow evening to get this thing settled. You may be spokesman," responded Mr. Dayton.

"Good enough! Don't know what I'll say," said the Methodist preacher, "but I'll

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let them down with a bump they'll remember!"

"It's safe enough for you to talk that way now, Brother Towne. You'll have till tomorrow night to change your mind. Jones is on safe ground. You'll have to back down the same as I did."

"Come now, Brother Dayton, what is there for us preachers to do about this matter?"

"Just get honest," came the reply.

"But the people at large, Bro. Dayton, will say if part of the Bible is mistranslated it is all mistranslated."

"Nonsense!"

"What do you think of that Jones, Bro. Dayton?"

"I should not be surprised if he's a splendid Christian man—better by far than any of us sectarian preachers, at any rate! With us a thing is all good or all bad, and proceeds from God or else the Devil. With

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us, when a man dies he goes either high up to Heaven or down to Hell. We're extremists. If we happen to have a little sense, Bro. Towne, we're mighty careful not to use it. If our best judgment condemns the least thing in the scripture, we are sure to call it the voice of the Devil, and condemn it on the spot!

"As leaders in religion, Bro. Towne, we are anything but progressive," continued the evangelist. "We hail with delight any improvement in politics or government or education. We go into raptures over improvements in architecture and machinery and means of travel like the electric car, the automobile, and the airship. But, listen! Let any one rise up and tell us that our Bible and our religion should be improved, and let him make it ever so convincing, even, and we want to hang the fellow right off. Isn't it strange?"

"If religion were not divinely implanted

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in human nature, Bro. Town," concluded the evangelist, with all the emphasis he could command, "preachers would have rooted it up and destroyed it centuries ago, for surely they have always made themselves genuinely ridiculous in the presence of men and women who think, and you and I are following along in the same old beaten paths."

CHAPTER XIII.

A LITTLE SCHEME

Yes, it is true that an old-time revival meeting was on in Lesterville, and that clashes had already occurred between the evangelist employed by the Methodist church and the two teachers of the village.

Next morning on his way to school, Delbert Jones, teacher of the upper grades, was overtaken by one of his pupils. Frank White had heard his father tell at the breakfast table that morning how, the evening before, the janitor had exposed the secrets of the meetings between the evangelist and the teachers. Frank told Mr. Jones all about it. It seems that the janitor had come up out of the basement Monday after school with broom in hand to do his work, when he heard a strange voice in Mr. Jones' room.

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He remained out in the hall and took in everything. Then Tuesday he did the same thing, and in the evening after supper went down to Pratt's store, where he told a lot of men all about it, declaring that Mr. Jones and Miss Ray had "put it all over the evangelist."

Most of the men who had gathered in the store at that early evening hour were either church members or church goers, and were on their way to the revival services. They were struck as with a club. It was now a matter of only a few hours when everybody in the whole surrounding country would learn of this "unfortunate event." What effect would this have on the revival? How would the young people of the community and the children of the school feel? These were things for the ministers to think about, and they were things for the teachers to think about also. Too bad education and religion cannot agree.

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But Rev. Towne, the Methodist minister, had by this time made up his mind that he would not let the teachers down with so big a bump after all. He had compared Luke's account of the childhood of Jesus with Matthew's account. He knew as well as Delbert that they did not agree. He had also compared Mark's account of the movements of Jesus after his baptism with that of John. Here, too, was a discrepancy. Then Rev. Towne referred to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John for the inscription on the cross, and found that no two agreed. He also bethought himself as to how utterly unwise it would be to advise people to "have no thought for the morrow." And again he got to thinking about the Lord's Prayer. God does not lead men into temptation, thought he. But if God does, he does it for a purpose, and we should not ask him to cease to do what he knows is best. The Lord's Prayer cannot, therefore, be the

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exact words of Jesus. Yes, Rev. Towne had fully given up the idea of "letting the teachers down with a bump they'd remember."

The Methodist minister went to the evangelist in the morning the first thing after breakfast, and after some discussion they decided to do two things. First, they would own up that the Old Testament and the New are alike imperfect; and, second, they would draw the Baptist preacher into the controversy if they could, so that he would have to take a share of the blame for the defeat, which they felt sure was coming. But how was this to be done? Now, Maytie Ray was from a Baptist home, and Rev. Black was her mother's pastor. Common courtesy would, under the circumstances, require Rev. Towne and Mr. Dayton to invite Rev. Black to be present and to take a hand in defending the text-book of the Christian faith against the onslaughts of Mr. Jones and the widow's daughter. What more

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graceful way was needed to approach Rev. Black?

While the evangelist and Rev. Towne would not have cared to share with the Baptist minister in victory, they were more than willing to share with him in defeat. And, not knowing the exact status of the debate, Rev. Black was easily induced to take a hand. He had heard that morning something of the "obstinacy," as he called it, of the teachers, and was greatly provoked at them, and really longed to do what Rev. Towne had given up doing, that is, to "let the teachers down with a bump they'd remember." Rev. Black accordingly promised the other two men that he would be chief defender of the faith that evening, and his righteous indignation at the situation was so aroused that he had to call Maytie Ray up by 'phone at noon to tell her what was going to happen. Somehow we cannot help thinking he did it largely out of hope

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of intimidating Miss Ray and causing her to keep out of the argument that evening. But, if that were his purpose, he did not succeed.

When school was out at four, Maytie went in to see Delbert and tell him what had transpired at noon.

"Mr. Jones, I want to tell you something," began Maytie. "Brother Black called me up by 'phone this noon."

"Has he been hearing something?"

"All about it!" replied Miss Ray.

"How does he feel?"

"He's on the war-path, and so is Rev. Towne. I don't know how the evangelist feels. Wouldn't be surprised if all three of those preachers are after us to-night. That's all right, though," continued Maytie. "I think it's time some of these things were settled. If they have anything to say, let them say it."

"Brave girl, Miss Ray! Why, we may both be slaughtered to-night!"

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"That's all right, Mr. Jones. I'm glad we've got those old dead-heads stirred up. Nothing less than a real explosion will waken the preachers in this town. Now, don't you scold the janitor, either."

"My, but you've got your fighting garments on this afternoon, haven't you?"

"I don't care, Mr. Jones. I've been trying for four or five years to get Brother Black to give me the why and wherefore of some of the things in the Bible, but he always has some sarcastic or humorous way to evade my questions. If he comes over this evening, I hope you'll get right after him. Yes, I do; and I'll help you, too. I believe he's an old hypocrite; and I don't believe Rev. Towne's any better."

"My, but you're hard on the preachers this evening," said Delbert.

"Well, may be I am. But I've reasons to be," replied Maytie.

"Now, if you're feeling a whole lot bet-

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ter, Miss Ray, I'm glad; but really you're awful!" And the way Delbert looked at her made her wonder if they did not already have something more than friendly regard for each other.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLACK TAKES A HAND

"There, didn't I tell you," said Maytie, looking out of the window.

"Tell me what?" asked Delbert.

"That all three of the ministers would probably come to-night."

"I expected them all myself," replied Delbert. "Mr. Dayton asked me this noon if it would be all right to bring Rev. Black along. And what do you think? Mr. Dayton told me that he and Rev. Towne are both satisfied that no one can defend the Bible as an infallible book."

"Well, then, why do they come again to-night?"

"Just to give Rev. Black a share in the controversy, it seems. The evangelist in-

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quired if I hadn't something further I'd just as soon ask the Baptist minister to explain."

"What did you tell him, Mr. Jones?"

"I told him I'd like to discuss the principles of the Christian religion with some one, just for my own personal good."

"Take care now!" said Maytie.

"I just want to reason a little about it, just as we do about other things. If I'm entertaining some wrong ideas, I want to be rid of them."

Several voices in the hall now told the teachers that the ministers were on hand. The greeting was as cordial as if nothing had ever happened or was ever going to happen. After a few general remarks had gone the rounds and all had taken seats, the Baptist preacher began:

"Isn't this religious controversy proving a mere waste of time, Mr. Jones? Would it not be wise to drop the matter right here and now?"

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“May be you are right, Rev. Black. I have not forced this controversy on you ministers. It is Rev. Towne’s doings that it was started. The other ministers and myself have already discussed some very important matters, and they have decided that the Bible is not an infallible book, and now you may explain a few things to me about the Christian religion, if you desire.”

“What’s that, young man? What’s that you say?” ejaculated Rev. Black.

“Now, let us not dig up the past,” spoke the evangelist. “Let us look to the new question!”

“I say, Brother Black, that if you desire you may explain to me something about the Christian religion.”

“Well, sir, I’ve studied it and preached it for a good many years. I will try to answer your questions, but I didn’t quite understand what you said about the Bible!”

“We will take up the main thread of the

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Bible presently," said Delbert to prevent a wrangle.

"But we won't have time to review anything, Mr. Jones," said Rev. Towne. "Let's press forward and get done."

"Brother Black," began Delbert, "your religion begins with the creation of the world. It is part of the Christian doctrine that the world was made in six days. But scientists tell us it was millions of years in the making, and thinking people everywhere are coming to believe it. Indeed, nearly all ministers now accept their explanation."

"I know it, young man. I know it. But you forget that the Bible says, 'A day with the Lord is as a *thousand years*.' "

"But, Brother Black," said Delbert, "would not that explanation lead to monstrous blunders in the reading of Holy Writ? Wouldn't that make the Sabbath day, wherever mentioned in the Bible, a thousand years long, too? The eighth command-

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ment would then have to be explained, "Remember the Sabbath thousand years to keep them holy!" The preacher was non-plussed, and looked so foolish that Miss Ray, who knew him well, could scarcely refrain from smiling. The other ministers began already to scent defeat for their Baptist brother, and to have the assurance that the community would not, at the end of the controversy, have the laugh on the Methodists any more than on the Baptists. And this is what they wanted.

"Well, go on, young man," said Rev. Black, "I'd never thought of that before!"

"Then the old story of Adam and the Garden of Eden does not appeal to me," continued Delbert. "Christianity teaches that God in the beginning made a perfect man and a perfect paradise for his home. But science in the last half century has been teaching that man and all other forms of

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life began in almost inconceivable simplicity of organization."

And Delbert proceeded to the next step in the story.

"Christianity teaches, Elder Black, that Adam, this perfect man, proceeded at once to disobey his Creator. I believe, Elder, in freedom of choice and freedom of will—that any man has power both to choose and to do wrong. But the fact that Adam, God's first human product, chose the wrong and did the wrong, compels me to suspect that he was not made perfect in the first place. Perfect people do not choose to disobey God, unless we agree to change the meaning of the word perfect."

"Well," said Elder Black, "I am not able to answer your objection, Mr. Jones. I don't understand, though, that Christianity is a religion of either reason or science anyway; but a religion of faith."

"But," retorted Maytie Ray with some

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emphasis, "How are we to have faith in such absurd things, Brother Black—things that look so extremely improbable?" The Elder shook his head a little, and the other preachers had to grin.

"Let us for the sake of argument, though," said Delbert, "suppose that Adam was a perfect man and that he *did* sin. Then we are brought face to face with the principles of 'transmission of sin' and 'fall of man.' But I must maintain, Elder Black, that if Adam sinned, it is Adam who should have paid for it, and not the race for Adam. That is not just; and God, we are told, is a just God. To inherit a physical defect or a tendency to some particular sin is bad enough, Elder, but to think that God willingly passes other men's sins down to us and charges them to our account as personal offenses against himself is to allow ourselves to think something dreadfully bad about God. This step in the Christian doctrine,

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this 'transmission of sin' and 'fall of man' idea, is even more absurd than the one about 'original sin.' Indeed, modern science makes it clear to those who will study the question that the fall of man has constantly been a fall upward, Elder Black, and not downward. History, too, as far back as records go, testifies to the same thing—that man has always been on the upward grade, always rising. There is less slavery, less war, less highway robbery, and fewer hard and cruel hearts in the world every century. Yes, ever since history began, at any rate, the world has been getting better. And I see nothing to indicate we ever had a 'fall.' There is certainly more transmission of righteousness, so to speak, in the world to-day than transmission of sin, if we are to believe historic records."

"I think, Mr. Jones," said Elder Black, "that if you will study men a little closer, you'll find them very low and fallen."

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"Not *fallen*, Rev. Black," said Delbert, "but *incomplete*!"

"Just think, Mr. Jones, of the mean things men do."

"Yes, and the good things, too, Elder Black. There's more good in the average man than bad—more saint than sinner. While he sometimes stoops to things very low, he often rises to things almost divine."

"As you recall your neighbors," said Maytie, "and the people in general wherever you have lived, Brother Black, do you recall as many bad people as good, or as many cruel acts as kind acts?"

"I must confess, Maytie," said her mother's pastor, "that I don't."

"Well, then, why do you call man 'fallen?' Is it because you like to find fault with him? Would it not be better to call him 'incomplete'?"

"May be you young folks look at this matter in a fairer way than we preachers do,

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with our distorted ideas and prejudiced notions.”

“Now, Elder Black,” said Delbert, “you see we have taken up the main thread of the Bible, as we said we would. It is the story of the Christian religion with its large inheritance from Judaism, and it is the Judaistic element that higher Christianity rejects. We have already referred briefly (1) to the creation of the world, (2) to original sin, (3) to the transmission of sin, and (4) to the fall of man.

“To follow up the old Hebrew story, we find that God was displeased with Adam’s descendants because Adam had sinned; and that God kept his back on them, as it were, for nearly two thousand years. He finally became so disgusted that he caused a flood to come and cover the earth, that he might ‘destroy all flesh.’ But the Good Book says that Noah found favor with God and builded a great ark into which he took his family and

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a pair of every living creature on the face of the earth, that there might be something left with which to begin life again after the flood was over. Just imagine God pouting around for two thousand years, when he, being all-wise, knew all the time that his work was a failure anyway. How foolish!

“But, Brother Black, mathematical science condemns the account of the flood. Mathematicians have figured it out from the dimensions of the ark, as given in the Bible, that there was not enough room for a pair of ‘every living creature.’

“Here, though, to my mind,” continued Delbert, “is the greatest absurdity of all: namely, that God should allow Noah and his children to be saved from the flood to start the race again. Brother Black, Noah was a descendant of Adam, who had sinned, and a member of a fallen race. Why did not God begin afresh with better stock if he wanted the race to be any better after the flood than

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before? for the flood experiment was a failure, we are told.

“No, gentlemen,” said Delbert with much stress as he eyed all three of the preachers, “creation of the world in six days; original sin; transmission of sin; fall of man; two thousand years of patience on the part of God, who knew all the while that man was a miserable failure anyway; a fruitless drowning of his own children; and the re-peopling of the earth with the same old sin-cursed stock is a wicked charge to make against an all-wise God. Don’t you think so?”

“Superstition, however, keeps this old Hebrew-Christian doctrine alive; but the educated few tolerate it only to escape social ostracism or commercial disadvantage.”

“Then, Mr. Jones, you do not believe in Christianity, I see,” said Rev. Black.

“Not in the Hebrew end of it, as I might say,” replied Delbert; “and not in the errors it has acquired in translation; and not in its

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wise theological accretions. I *do* believe, however, in the latter portion, or Jesus end, of that old doctrine, as it were—in the religion of Jesus, as I see and understand that religion. But Jesus himself would not be a Christian if he lived to-day.”

“What, Jones!” ejaculated all three ministers, “Christ not a Christian!”

“You have my meaning, gentlemen. You must understand there is a vast difference between the plain Nazarene leading his undesigning countrymen, and the fashionable preacher of to-day palavering over a congregation of extortioners or their beneficiaries; a vast difference, too, between the simple religion of Jesus, and the Christianity of to-day with eighty-seven conflicting denominations.”

At this point came a lull in the conversation. The face of each minister was a study. The few minutes of quiet which followed marked the final conversion of one of the

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ministers, who for several days had been bringing himself to see that the only religion for a progressive age like ours is one which will appeal to the intellectual as well as the emotional side of human nature, and one which will not rob the individual of the right to think for himself.

“Brother Dayton,” began Elder Black, “you are traveling about a great deal as an evangelist. What do you think of this young man’s ideas? Do you think he knows more than the Bible and more than God Almighty?”

Rev. Dayton saw from his down-cast eyes and the flush on his face that Delbert Jones was suffering keenly from this unkind cut, and righteous indignation possessed the evangelist, who had this to say:

“I think, Rev. Black, that this man Jones is just about as big as a ten acre field of men like yourself. In his language, he certainly manifests Christian character, and that is

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more than I can say for you. When a minister has no argument with which to answer a thinking man," continued the evangelist looking sharply at the Baptist preacher, "he too often hurls back an insult like the one you did; but those words, 'he thinks he knows more than the Bible and God Almighty himself,' are only a saucy acknowledgment of defeat; for it is based upon the assumption, yes, the assumption, that the Bible is God's word cover to cover, when we have been assuming no such thing in these discussions. Mr. Jones has tried, Elder Black, honestly, politely, and successfully, I think, to show us that many things are in the Bible which God never had anything to do with. Of course, he has relied on science, reason, and common sense, without taking anything for granted. But no man is to be condemned for resorting to the reason power which God gave him, and refusing to be influenced by assumptions and superstitions.

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“Yes, Rev. Black, my work as an evangelist takes me into five or six different states. And I must say that it’s nowadays almost an impossibility to persuade a calm, thoughtful man or woman to join any of these denominational churches—for my work, you understand, is with many Christian sects. In fact, few such people will attend revival meetings at all. Of course, we get quite a harvest of nervous women, and a number of children who do not understand the step they are taking.

“But we are wasting lots of valuable time, Rev. Black, in trying to get people to accept the nonsensical parts of our religion—the ‘six-day-creation’ argument, and the ‘original-sin’ idea, and ‘transmission of sin,’ and ‘fall of man,’ and ‘trinity,’ and ‘eternal hell,’ and a lot of other arguments just as unnecessary and just as unreasonable and just as hard to pound into the heads of thinking people.

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“What civilization is suffering for to-day, gentlemen, is a religion in keeping with the growth of knowledge. The world is becoming wiser and constantly more distrustful of the extravagant stories in the Bible. Truly enough, the time was when nothing but miraculous claims would appeal to the people. But that time is past. Men of culture nowadays insist that God is constantly in harmonious relation with this universe of his, and that he does not violate his own laws to make men distrustful. God wants men to be religious, and will assist, not hinder. The miracles of the Bible may have been helpful and necessary in their time, but they are now a positive impediment to religious progress. Just look at what is transpiring in Europe to-day!”

“But, Brother Dayton,” inquired Elder Towne in a sort of discouraged attitude, “what is to be saved from these storms which are becoming so common these days?”

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“Lots! All we need and all we want and all we can defend as honest men. But let Mr. Jones answer that question for you in the near future. After having had a private talk with him at Mr. Buff’s, I have utmost faith in Mr. Jones.

“As for myself,” concluded Mr. Dayton, “I shall continue to labor as an evangelist. But I shall try to preach, from now on, nothing but good sound sense, realizing, in the words of a great present-day divine, that ‘The wings of error have borne down upon them through countless ages great and indestructible religious truths.’ ”

CHAPTER XV.

DAYTON NEXT MORNING

Next morning, after an early breakfast, Reverend Dayton chanced to meet Delbert Jones in the postoffice.

"There's one other matter which I should like to talk with you about, Mr. Jones, when it is convenient."

"Suppose, then, we go right over to my room," replied Delbert. It was only a few moments till the two men were comfortably seated in Delbert's quarters at William Buff's.

"I am not able to understand, Mr. Jones, how you could pass through those questioning years at high school, and four more at the university, where so many liberal ideas have made their way, and all the while retain your orthodox faith."

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“Simply by giving a deaf ear to what was being said,” replied Delbert, “and not allowing myself to reason. I was holding onto the religion my mother had taught me. Don’t you know that lots of people after a fashion compel themselves to believe things—just force their assent when their better judgment is all the while rebelling?”

“But what caused you to let go of your faith while attending a *theological* school, that is, so much of your faith?”

“To answer your question in plain English, Mr. Dayton, it was the insincerity which I found to exist in the Christian ministry, more than anything else. Many of the students in my classes at the seminary maintained that, if the truth were known, preachers themselves were becoming lax in faith; and I desired to learn at first hand just the attitude of the active ministry to the profession they made. If I had a reconstruction period to face in my own religion, I thought

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it high time to begin. So, what did I do but take a position the next summer with a publishing house to sell reference books in the small towns of Michigan. I took up this work very largely in order to meet and talk with ministers. Of course, it required some explanation, and some confession, and much tact, in many instances, to get these village ministers to express frankly their sincere or innermost thoughts."

"How many did you interview that summer, Mr. Jones?"

"There were eleven in all; and really and truly, Mr. Dayton, there were but two of those eleven ministers who believed in full the things they were preaching and the doctrines they'd pledged themselves to support.

"One of those two was a Free Methodist with just enough education barely to read the Bible. The other was a Campbellite, who, a few years previous, had quit one of the building trades to preach. I think he

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had been a carpenter, though I am not certain."

"How about the other nine, Mr. Jones?"

"Three of the others wouldn't talk enough to justify me in drawing any definite conclusion. They were honest enough not to lie, and shrewd enough to dodge my questions, which I would never press because I was a stranger. As I have since learned, however, they were experiencing what I have had to experience, that is, a reconstruction of faith.

"This leaves six, I believe," said Delbert.

"Yes," replied Rev. Dayton.

"Well, those six all belonged to the same class. They were not all equally guilty of insincerity, however. One man, a jolly good fellow, occupied a Congregational pulpit, but was preaching all sorts of liberal ideas in plain unmistakable language. I heard this man at a morning service. In fact, I heard nearly all the eleven ministers preach

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to whom I refer. After church, I tarried a little to scold the fellow.

“ ‘How dare you talk so in a Congregational pulpit?’ is the way I began on him. He just laughed heartily and remarked, ‘O, my people here let me say what I please.’ The only fault to find in this case, Mr. Dayton, is the fact that the words ‘Congregational Church’ were posted on the outside. But this is fault enough. This is hypocrisy.

“The next minister of this last group was supposed to be a Baptist. But he, too, was preaching just what he pleased. A few months later I learned that he was practically asked to resign. And I don’t blame his congregation; and he didn’t blame them either. This man, too, was as jolly a fellow as one could wish to meet. I had a way to tell him, though, that he was guilty of hypocrisy, and he had a way to own up. He was with some liberal congregation the last I heard of him—just where he belonged.

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“The next minister, Mr. Dayton, I found in his study in the back of his church. I went to him for some explanations, but he frankly told me that what I wanted explained was not capable of explanation, and assured me in very emphatic terms that the Christian religion is not a religion of reason anyway, but of faith. His last statement was, ‘Young man, if I’d reason about my religion for fifteen minutes my faith would all leave me.’ I believe he was a good man at heart, but was compelling himself to uphold some things in the creed of his church which he did not believe at the time himself.

“Another one of these ministers, I met in the hotel office in his own town one Saturday afternoon. I shall never forget him. He was as cultured and refined as any man I ever met. But, O my! In our private talk, how he did rail against many of the cardinal points in the doctrine of his church! The next morning, at 10:30, I heard him preach.

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But I could hardly make myself believe it was the same man with whom I had talked, so tenderly did he handle that nice little orthodox sermon of his. I never was quite so much disgusted with a man before in my life. He had told me one story, as it were, and his congregation an opposite story about the same thing. I have wondered since if he hadn't been an actor in his younger days. He certainly had the knack of telling very earnestly things which he did not believe."

"Such things, Mr. Jones," said the evangelist, "are disgusting."

"Such things, Mr. Dayton, knock many a fellow off his feet, for a time at least, and sometimes forever.

"The next minister I recall was a presiding elder in the Methodist church—a district superintendent. By this time I had become quite proficient in talking these modern ideas, and I fell easily into the hands of the superintendent one evening after his quar-

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terly meeting in the village. I say 'evening' because he had held another service the forenoon of the same day about three miles out in the country.

"Much to my surprise, I found him still willing to talk; and, still more to my surprise, I found him in perfect accord with nearly all the ideas I have recently presented to you about the Bible and Christianity—ideas as different from those in the Methodist ritual as white is different from black.

" 'But, Elder,' I remarked, 'you are not a Methodist at all!'

" 'Can't help that, Mr. Jones, that's what I believe anyway.'

" 'But you are not a type,' said I, 'or fair representative of the men high up in your denomination, are you?'

" 'I certainly am!' insisted the man of piety. 'The other men occupying positions similar to mine in the church believe just about as I do.'

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“I wish now,” said Delbert, “that I had had the courage to ask him how he enjoyed believing one thing and preaching another. Honestly, Mr. Dayton, if you can forgive the harshness, and you certainly can under such disgusting circumstances, this man deserved a jail sentence for misrepresentation. If anything in this world is disgusting, it is hypocrisy.

“Then I found another minister, a man not over thirty-five years of age, who was as bright as a new dollar, and as two-faced as he was bright. This man was as liberal in his religious views as was the presiding elder I mentioned. In my interview with him, I was trying not to be hard on the fellow, for somehow I couldn’t help liking him; but he insisted on helping me characterize his conduct.

“ ‘I know just what you want to say,’ said he. ‘Why don’t you say it? You want to call me a hypocrite.’

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“ ‘Not quite so bad as that,’ said I, for I always did hate to call ugly names.

“ ‘Well, at least you think me insincere, and I can’t blame you. But I expect to join the conference this fall, anyway, and shall do so without any compunctions. I’m going to oppose this abominable old creed of ours, all I can in safety to my own head, at least; and I expect to do so on the inside of the church.’ ”

“ ‘Better stop flaunting false colors, old man, and better not take church vows at the conference which you know beforehand you cannot keep.’ ”

“Did you tell him that, Mr. Jones?”

“No, I just thought it.”

“Well, you should have told him.”

“Now, let me say, Mr. Dayton, that these men I have told you about are real flesh-and-blood ministers whom I can even now locate, and that I have related absolute facts only.”

“I don’t wonder, Mr. Jones, that your

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summer's experience gave your religion a terrible shaking up, and that you were compelled to reconsider the whole thing. But wasn't your investigation a little too limited to justify you in making such a general deduction?"

"I hardly think so, Mr. Dayton, for I traveled about over a large part of the state. Besides you know yourself that the trial of ministers for heresy is becoming common reading matter these days in our newspapers."

"I know it, Mr. Jones."

"But don't misunderstand me, Mr. Dayton, the foundation stones of my faith are still intact."

"Good!" exclaimed the evangelist. "And you'll be a minister yet, won't you?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Dayton. I think I can do more good outside the church. However, I consider the work of the ministry, when honestly pursued, to be the

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noblest work on earth, and the *most needful*.

“And,” continued Delbert, “if all the liberal ministers who are now filling sectarian pulpits would only come out and show their true colors—would only declare publicly what they now tell behind the curtain—thousands upon thousands of growing boys, builded up in saner ideas, would be saved the embarrassment of seeing their religious inheritance at a tremendous discount when, later, they go out into life, or land in some college town in pursuit of higher education.

“When Jesus was on earth in the flesh, he said, ‘Ye must be born again.’ If he were to come back now, he would say the same thing; for, one of his intellect could see that what we are suffering for to-day, is a religion in keeping with changed conditions and larger thought.”

CHAPTER XVI.

JONES IN CONSTRUCTIVE MOOD

To say this religious controversy in Lesterville was stirring up the whole village and the country for miles around would be putting it none too strong. And, just as sister states are one when a nation is assaulted, just so were the Methodists and Baptists and other straggling sectarians now one in Lesterville. Indeed, the Baptist minister was already taking a hand in the Methodist meetings. And instead of the debate putting a quietus on the revival, the Christian people were only singing the more and praying the louder. Outsiders, though, were probably attending the meetings more in the hope of hearing something about the controversy than through any desire to have their souls saved. The prayers offered by the

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evangelist and the other two ministers, it should be said, however, had contained the words and the spirit which told that only kindness prevailed. Unlike most events of this sort, the preachers had indulged in no ugly remarks at any time about how the teachers were imps of the lower world. Perhaps this is due partly to the fact that the people knew better and partly because the ministers early realized they stood a good chance to be defeated.

By way of explanation, it should be said that on Wednesday evening, before revival services, one of the deacons suggested to his pastor that all persons officially connected with both churches be permitted to attend the final meeting of the teachers and the preachers, which had already been agreed upon for four o'clock of the next day. Delbert Jones was to speak constructively on religion. Permission was granted.

Through a misunderstanding on the part

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of one of the good brothers, however, the statement got out that everybody was invited. Accordingly, as the hour approached, people of all grades of piety began to file into the school building to the astonishment of preachers and teachers alike. By 4:15 all seats and aisles were filled and a double row stood around the room. And more were coming. At the suggestion of the Methodist minister, the meeting was adjourned to the Methodist church, where a much larger crowd could be accommodated.

At 4:30 o'clock Delbert Jones began a short, plain talk, which in substance, though not in full, was as follows:

“Friends of the church and the school:

“Religion is the biggest thing in the world. It is also the most important thing and the most unsettled. It is the biggest thing because it concerns two worlds, the present and the hereafter. It is the most important because it has to do with all the

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occupations in life, and the unquestioned authority to spread its 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not' everywhere. It is the most unsettled thing because, not content to concern itself with the practical and the knowable, it tries to speak authoritatively about many things which are *impractical* and *unknowable*. But if there is any one thing more than another that people should be agreed upon, it is the great and essential principles of religion. Mark what I say, 'the great and essential' principles. Until we formulate such an agreement and band ourselves together in visible organic form, we shall continue to live in that attitude toward one another which shall mean to most people outside the churches that nothing is sure about religion; for the large number of competing denominations in every community lead the ordinary mind to *subconscious distrust* and religious indifference.

"But how is this agreement to be reached?

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“Not many months ago, I made a trip to a certain small city here in the state to visit some friends. On arriving at the place early in the afternoon, I learned that a railroad wreck had occurred in the vicinity the night before. The air was all astir with stories of the disaster.

“One fellow said it occurred a mile west of town on the Whaleback road, that the east-bound midnight passenger flew the track owing to a defective rail, and that the engineer and fireman were both killed. The other trainmen and the passengers escaped without serious injury. He further stated that little damage was done to the engine or coaches. Another gentleman told the same story except that the engine was so badly smashed that it was fit only for the junk pile. Another said the engine could easily be repaired, but that two of the coaches were so seriously racked that rebuilding would be necessary. A lady, who had looked

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through some broken windows, declared that the upholstered seats were uninjured; while another said that several in the middle of the first coach were sadly twisted and marred. And so on, went the differences of opinion.

“The next day was the day for the publication of the local paper. But the editor had been so busy on account of the sickness of one of his printers that he had not found time to leave the shop. Being a particular friend of mine and knowing that I had been on the street all the afternoon, though I had not visited the wreck, he asked me to make a write-up for his paper. Here, in substance, is what came out in the weekly next day:

“ ‘A terrible wreck occurred last Wednesday night on the Whaleback road one mile west of this city. The east-bound midnight passenger was derailed, killing the engineer and fireman. Others on board escaped with

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only minor injuries. The rolling stock was damaged, but to what extent it is too early to state at this writing. Particulars will be given later. A defective rail was the cause.'

"I could not say less, for all this was vouched for by all the spectators. I could not say more, for this is all they were agreed upon. I had faith in the coincident testimony of the witnesses, but could not be certain about any more.

"Now, a similar thing has happened to the Christian religion in this country in the last twenty-five years. It has collided with scholarship. And, friends, I offer you this afternoon, as a safe guide in the solution of this perplexing question of how to unite our much-divided Christian forces, the 'coincident testimony' principle just referred to. What the Christian churches are all agreed upon is probably true; what they are divided over may all be false.

"The great religious agreements consti-

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tute what, for the time being, I shall term the Common Christian Faith; and it is this common faith I am commending to you this afternoon as the one religious platform upon which all Christians could stand as a united church in the common cause of humanity, for salvation in this world and a fair chance for the next—Christianity with all theology abstracted, as it were, and only the pure religion of Jesus left.”

No sooner had Delbert Jones completed his speech than a man about eighty years old rose up in the audience and began:

“Say, boy, them’s the most sensible idees I’ve hearn these many a day. I hain’t got no edgucation, but I started out in life nigh onto sixty-five years ago with only one shirt to my back, an’ now they tell me I’m the heaviest taxpayer in this part of the county. It has took lots o’ common horse sense, young man, to ’cumulate all my property; an’ that common horse sense tells me you’ve

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got the bull by the horns in this religus bizness. You may not believe it, young feller, but I know jus' what you mean by that 'coincident testimony' or 'religus agreement' bizness."

"You bet! Uncle Si knows!" shouted a dozen voices in the audience.

"Now," resumed Uncle Si, "I've never jined a church in my life. Me an' the ol' lady thought forty years ago that we'd like to start out in the Christian life; an' we 'tended a revival meetin' here in this same ol' Baptist church that Elder Black's a runnin.' The minister's name then wuz Elder Barringer. An' when he saw me an' Nancy wuz warmin' up to their meetin's, he made a trip out to the farm an' tuck dinner with us one day. After dinner the ol' lady an' me an' the Elder sot down an' talked the hull thing over. We got his story purty well in mind before he returned to town.

"But when the Methodists got onto it

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that we wuz thinkin' 'bout jinin' a church, they made an excuse to work in a little of their missionary work on us, too. But the Baptist story an' the Methodist story didn't jibe, an' so Nancy an' me held off a little.

"Soon the hull darned country 'round these parts heard 'bout us wantin' to jine church. Well, then the preachers and the pious folks *did* come. An', like decent folks, of course, we listened to them all.

"But the Methodist folks told one story; an' the Baptists another. An' the United Brethren had *their* story. But, any way, Nancy an' me got so tangled up in religus idees that we didn't know hedz from talz.

"But we know'd they'd sed lots uv good things; an', as dummed an ol' fool as I am now, if I only had some edgucation I could set down an' write the hull Christian story so's they all say 'amen.' Course, there'd be lots of things I'd leave out; but nothin' necessary to make it one beautiful story.

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All I'd leave out'd be the things they're arguin' over; an' the obscure things; an' the infinite things, which these finite minds can't grab onto.

"Young man, it's that 'coincident testimony' bizness you talked 'bout that strikes the right spot in your ol' Uncle Si. What all the Christian churches are agreed upon is the rock of my religus faith. Here I've been believin' in the Christian religion for many years an' didn't relize it. Young man, I thank you for the name—the 'Common Christian Church.'

"An' now let me tell you somethin'. If this proposition of yourn proves to be a winnin' idee in these parts, Josiah Bronson will build the finest religus temple in this section of the state. An' the ol' chap'l put into it the finest pipe organ in the country, an' fix it up in every way becomin' to the glorious idees which it is to proclaim, only the nabers must keep it a goin'!"

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“And this temple,” spoke up some one in the audience, “shall be a memorial to the splendid life of Uncle Josiah Bronson, who has for many years embraced the unchallenged claims of the Christian faith, but who never had a name for his religion till Delbert Jones supplied it.”

The large audience now rose and sang the first two verses of that splendid old hymn:

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne,
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLATFORM OF AGREEMENTS

It had been announced that the meeting would stand adjourned after the singing of that non-sectarian hymn, "Blessed be the tie that binds." But the people tarried. They began at once to comment enthusiastically in groups about the room on Uncle Si Bronson's proposition to build a splendid new church if the people would only lay aside their differences and unite on a common platform.

One wise old lady could see that, if they *did* all join the same church, they would not all have to believe the same thing and to think by the same rule. "We could all subscribe to a simple statement of faith, emphasize the points upon which we are agreed,

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and keep still about our differences," she remarked.

But, the consensus of opinion seemed to be, after all, that it is only the theological discussions of those high up in the various churches; the decisions of church councils; and the patronizing reference to dogma by denominational papers that fosters and perpetuates religious division; not the church members themselves.

One man in the crowd was heard to remark:

"John, you and I are not at all agreed on the tariff question, and not exactly on the money question; but still we both belong to the Democratic party and both go to hear the same political orators. Why, then, couldn't we belong to the same church, even though we don't exactly agree in our religion?"

"We could," came the reply.

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Another man, who had an eye for business as well as religion, remarked:

“It wouldn’t cost as much, either, to keep one church in repair as it does two. And it wouldn’t cost as much to heat and light and do the janitor work for one as it does for two. And our two mediocre choirs would make one rousing good one. And the salaries of our two ministers combined would hire a man of originality and power for our pulpit. All in all, it seems to me that to unite our two churches would be a mighty good thing, unless people would have to surrender so many of their Methodist or Baptist ideas as to make them dissatisfied and unhappy.”

Delbert Jones heard this last statement, and replied:

“But no one would be asked to give up anything. Difference of opinion and originality of thought would not even be discouraged. The time has never been when

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people could all think alike in religion, and that time will probably never come; furthermore, I see no reason why it should come. Nor do I see any reason why people of the same creed should be in the same church together with other people excluded. To associate with those of different views would be to give all persons greater intellectuality and broader sympathy. But the important thing to urge upon the people would be to emphasize their agreements, work shoulder to shoulder for human uplift, and never mind their differences."

"Mity good way to put it, young man! Mity good way!" spoke up Uncle Si.

And the words, "emphasize their agreements," which were overheard by those in that part of the church, soon created a demand for Delbert Jones to get up in the pulpit and enumerate the things upon which all Christian churches are a unit. Delbert proceeded in this wise:



“Mity good way to put it, young man! Mity good way!”

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“The people before me who have read religious history will bear me out in the statement that for more than one thousand five hundred years the world had, in a large sense, only one Christian church. But, even in the time of the apostles, Paul rebuked the people at Corinth because of a *tendency* there to break up into sects. He said:

“ ‘It hath been declared to me that there are contentions among you. Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollis; and I of Cephis; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Now I beseech you, brethren, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you—that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.’

“Paul wished them to speak those things only upon which they were all agreed, realizing that there was enough agreement of mind and agreement of judgment on the essential points of their religion, at least,

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to hold the Christian people together as a united church.

“Paul’s advice was fairly well heeded by the Christian people for more than one thousand five hundred years, when Martin Luther protested against the church and broke away. Then there were two churches—the Catholic and the Protestant.

“Then, up rose John Calvin, and protested against the Protestant church and broke away. Then there were three churches.

“What Martin Luther did, whether justified or not, fast became the fashion; and Huss and Zwingli and Wesley and Smith and Campbell and a host of others all along the line took a hand in the business of ‘protesting’ till we now have eighty-seven separate and distinct denominations.

“But, if we will call up all these sects into which the Christian church has been divided, and ask them to tell their story, we shall find them agreed upon the following points:

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THE COMMON PLATFORM

First, we believe in God, the Creator and Preserver of the universe, to whom we ascribe intelligence and power and love.

Second, by virtue of having created us, God is our Father.

Third, inasmuch as we have a common Father, the human kind of earth are brothers and sisters.

Fourth, these kindred, collectively considered, constitute the God family.

Fifth, the most essential thing in the family is love. Therefore, when God made us he implanted in his children that wonderful attribute. And, just as mortar holds the stones and bricks together in a building, just so should love bind the family together.

Sixth, we believe in prayer—that attitude of mind and heart which leads to noble resolutions and better life.

Seventh, we believe that good conduct will

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be rewarded, and evil conduct, punished.

Eighth, we believe in work—honest toil. The religious life is above all a life of service. We not only pray ‘Thy kingdom come,’ we work to bring it!

Ninth, we believe in the community church, as a place where men and women shall meet for inspiration and planning, to the end that larger results for the good of the individual and the community may be obtained through co-operation.

Tenth, we believe in immortality and in Jesus Christ.

“In a word, the churches all believe in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; in love and service and prayer; in reward and punishment; in immortality; in Jesus Christ; and in the church; also in the evolution of character from infancy to age. These are the unchallenged and indestructible Christian principles which have come down through the centuries. Let any indi-

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vidual believe all the more he can, these are the coincident testimony, the great agreements, the common platform.

“Any respectable person who believes simply in the doctrine of ‘an immanent and loving God, and in the precept, be serviceable to fellowmen’ should be received into membership and retained in the church so long as he ‘hallows’ the name of ‘Our Father’ and works for ‘Kingdom come.’

“The one advanced stand which should be taken—one in strictest keeping with the teaching and life of Jesus, but sadly neglected by all Christian sects, is forcefully stated in these words by an eminent American: At the head of the local church should be a ‘minister trained in the best methods of improving the social and industrial conditions of human life,’ one of whose chief duties it should be to impart that kind of knowledge and training to the members of his congregation. This minister should ‘concern him-

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self more with the cause of any particular sin than with the sin itself,' and should 'attack wrong and evil at their starting point.' "

When Delbert Jones had finished, Uncle Si Bronson rose to his feet and began:

"Enny buddy that can't absorb an' except them religus idees is too durned ignurent to live in a civilized naberhood, young man, and I think myself that it's hi time the preachers wuz a gettin' busy at doin' somethin' besides preachin,' an' prayin,' an' findin' fault with sins almost forced on the people by soshul and industrial condishuns over which the people themselves hain't got no control.

"That idee, young man, of the preachers a gettin' at the causes of wrongs instid of the wrongs themselves, an' of attackin' the wrongs at the startin' point is a mity good idee! Now, ol' Si Bronson's got 'bout \$50,000 to invest in that kind o' religun fer Lesterville, if it's goin' to be a winnin' idee."

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A standing vote showed the huge audience unanimously in favor of the Common Christian Faith, not as another religion, but as a united Christian church, one which would hold families together and communities together for mutual uplift. And Uncle Si Bronson was picked up by two strong young farmers, one a Baptist and the other a Methodist, and carried to the rostrum, while all the people applauded an old man of eighty, who had always kept the Golden Rule, but who for many many years had been "so tangled up in religus idees that he didn't know hedz from talz."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE

Delbert Jones and Maytie Ray were conscientious teachers. They did not permit even religion to make inroads on the time belonging to the children in their charge. After school of the day following the big meeting, Mr. Jones approached Miss Ray with this question:

“Really, Miss Ray, what do you think of my proposition for all churches to adopt the same general platform, as it were, and the same name?”

“There is surely enough material out of which to construct a highly intelligent and attractive religion, Mr. Jones, as your statement of common principles goes to show. I certainly think it a fine idea.”

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“And what about having a few large churches instead of so many small ones, as another improvement, Miss Ray?”

“I think it needful everywhere,” came the reply, “but especially in the suburbs of large cities, in small towns, and in country places. The cost of supporting several small churches where one large one would accommodate the people is wicked extravagance. Then, too, a small church means a small congregation, poor music, and a poor preacher. These conditions do not attract, and will never win the world for religion.”

“Do you think,” asked Delbert, “that Uncle Si Bronson will build the church? He was very enthusiastic yesterday; but, of course, would not be held to his bargain under religious excitement.”

“He will build it, Mr. Jones. He has said for several years that he intends to leave something behind to remind us of him. It looks, too, as though the people are going

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to lay aside their differences and all come into Uncle Si's church."

"Yes, Miss Ray, but a few of the *older* people with a 'kink,' as we might call it, in their religious system will find it no easy matter—that is, those who were reared in a sectarian home and have always attended a sectarian church.

"Miss Ray, it is innocently done by parents, of course, and they should not be blamed; but I tell you it is a sad mistake to give children a creed, or sectarian, bent. Children should be trained straight up, as it were. When they become old enough to think for themselves, then they could develop their own religious personality in the light of research and their own judgment.

"The revival meeting, too," continued Delbert, "is a great place to put that kink into folks. It doesn't usually stay long in the older ones, but the bandages used after such an event is over are often kept on the

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children by their parents, and they grow up in a sort of deformed or unnatural way, as I might say. There is nothing, though, that I myself enjoy more than a good warm revival meeting. It affords an opportunity for a sort of spiritual tickling, as it were. And I don't know that it hurts anyone, unless he makes a religious decision under the spell and joins a church. This, however, I could never approve."

"Where in the world, then, Mr. Jones, would you convert people, if not in revival meetings?"

"You see, Miss Ray, the Church of Common Faith would not trouble itself about the unknowable things of theological controversy. It would be plain and simple, and anyone with a fair degree of intelligence could sit down in his own home and convert himself, which after all is the best kind of conversion. If he desired membership in a local church, and he certainly should, he

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could apply for it the same as he would for membership in a club or a lodge. If it isn't worth asking for, it isn't worth having. Of course, an invitation to join the church is strictly proper and in good taste; but undue influence or excitement should not be used. That's what I'm trying to get at."

"The Common Faith, though," continued Delbert, "*could* be and *should* be taught to people from early childhood; for, unlike sectarianism, it would keep the individual erect, or 'straight up,' as I like to say. Children reared under such instruction would, at every stage of their development, be like that tall, straight tree out in the yard, not like the little bent one near it.

"No, Miss Ray," said Delbert, "just as there is but one way to teach that much-discussed subject of temperance, and that is to begin with the children, just so should it be with religion, begin with the children."

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“But how would you manage it, Mr. Jones?”

“I’d teach religion by grades,” said Jones, “much as we teach our children in the public schools. Of course, at first the work would have to be looked after in the home and the Sunday School, for the most part. But it should be pursued in a systematic fashion by grades. The children should be put through a regular, though somewhat elastic, course of study and practice, and graduated much as we graduate them from our public schools.

“I’d make a course covering twelve grades, and parallel grade for grade with the work in our ward schools and our high schools. A child should be as virtuous as he is smart. When he graduates from the eighth grade in the public school, he should graduate from the eighth grade of the church. When he completes the twelfth grade in the public high school and gets his

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diploma, he should receive another from the twelfth grade in the church. And, by this plan, if his character should not be as well trained as his head, his chances for a place of honor and trust in life would be impaired. That's as it should be. This arrangement would give us better administrators of government; more of the truthful kind of business men; more honest bankers; fewer of crooked people in other high places; and a more nearly square deal for the laboring people in health conditions, wages, and so forth."

"That has the ring of common sense, Mr. Jones, to say the least," said Maytie, "and is worthy of the most serious consideration on the part of all people interested in progress. I like what you say about rearing children 'straight up,' as you expressed it—of exercising care that there be no 'kink' or 'bent' in their young moral natures—also the proposition to impart religious instruction

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and training by grades. These ideas seem good to me."

"You see, Miss Ray, religion should not come to people in a single leap or bound any more than education does, but in orderly growth. I know that the Christian doctrine of instantaneous salvation teaches people that they may sin away the best years of their lives and still come in for their share of heaven's best reward. This sort of preaching has led many a man to put off the quitting of his sinful ways till days of gray hair or the deathbed, and has lost to the world thousands of useful lives. This is a bad doctrine."

"But, such an embarrassing thing as this, Mr. Jones, would be obviated in a majority of cases by your plan to begin with young children and teach them religion by grades. Have you ever undertaken to write a graded course in religious instruction?"

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"I have," replied Delbert, "and should like to show it to you one of these days."

"And I should like very much to see it, I assure you," replied Maytie. "It must have taken lots of time and pains to prepare it. In the work of outlining such a course, what did you find it necessary to keep uppermost in mind?"

"There were three things which I had to be careful about:

"It was necessary to keep clear of everything of a sectarian character; to note the nature of child environment, near and remote, at every stage of his development; and, lastly, to have regard for the growing diameter of the child's consciousness. My exact meaning and how I would accomplish this end will be more evident when you come to examine the course."

At this, the teachers returned to their homes.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MONUMENT TO UNCLE SI

When the hour came that evening for a meeting of all interested in one united church for Lesterville, a large good-natured audience was confronted by three preachers and two teachers on the rostrum before them. Education and religion had finally come to agree.

Enrollment blanks were soon filled out by all the Methodist and Baptist brethren, and church fusion was accomplished. Not only that, but nearly all the other church-loving adults present were pleased to do likewise, inasmuch as the applicant for membership was simply required to repeat these words:

“I DESIRE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LIFE AND RELIGION; TO MAKE MY HEART AND WILL

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MORE AND MORE RESPONSIVE TO HUMAN NEEDS; AND TO ASSIST THIS CHURCH FINANCIALLY AND OTHERWISE IN A PROGRAM FOR HUMAN BETTERMENT.”

Without pleadings of any kind, or pressure of any sort, a total enrollment of three hundred eighteen was secured before the close of service that evening for what was to be known as the Lesterville Community Church, an over-church, as it were, such as Delbert Jones had been dreaming about—one broad enough in principle to permit each individual member to make his own religious decisions and maintain his own religious personality, be it ever so peculiar. And those few thinking individuals of the town who, in the past, were wont to say that, “No church is big enough for a great man,” were now willing and glad to be silent.

Union meetings, to alternate between the two churches, were announced; and the two choirs became one, with a violin and a cornet

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to add to the charm of this part of religious service.

If any people thought this prompt action was crowding Uncle Si into keeping his promise of erecting a \$50,000 church, they were deceiving themselves; for all the interest and energy displayed on that occasion made him the happiest individual in the audience, who forthwith purchased a sightly location for a beautiful structure to be erected on the same plan as a church recently built in a near-by city.

An unusually mild winter made it possible to pursue the work without interruption. It was a good time, too, for securing help from the farmers, and the mechanics who lived in neighboring towns.

On March first, the new church was dedicated; and, on the first Sunday in June, it was formally opened to the public. Both the building and its furnishings were as splendid as anyone could wish to see; and

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such a service, with its beautiful music and masterful address, was never before heard in Lesterville as was heard that day when Uncle Si's church was opened to receive its first worshipers. And, in front of its altar, on the evening of June twenty-first, two young people who for some time had realized they were practically one in thought and one in a broad religious faith became one in name.

[FINIS]

